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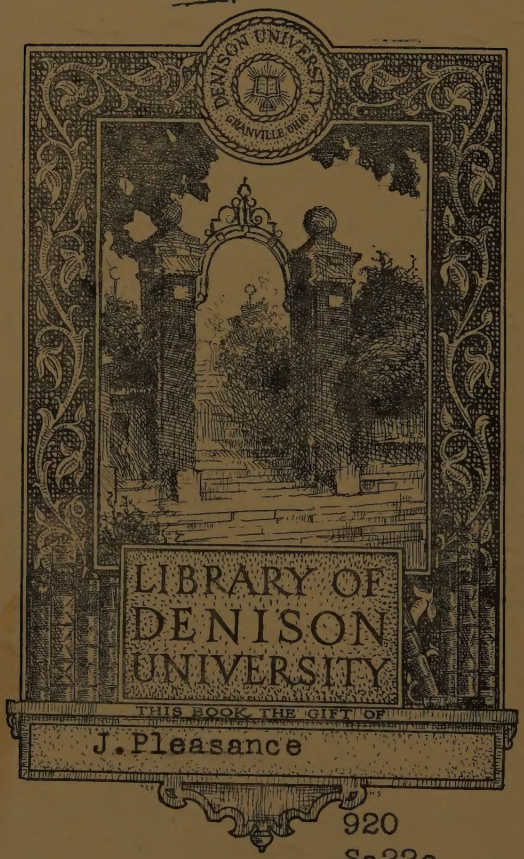

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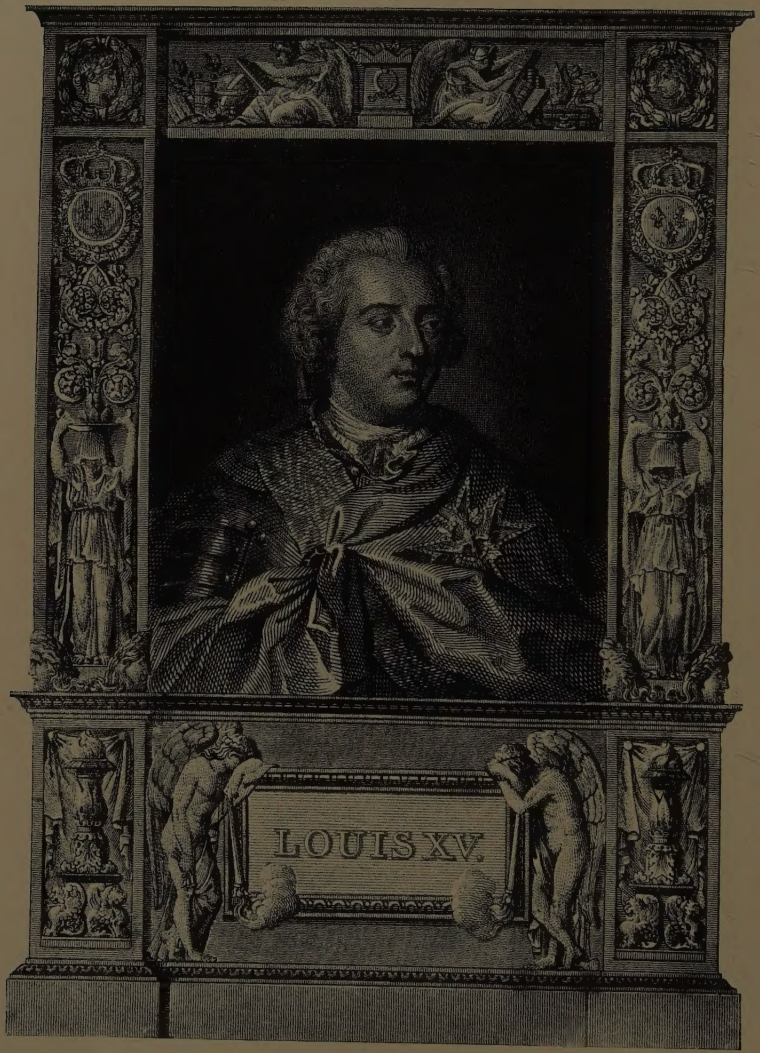

LOUIS XV.

After the painting by J. B. le Moyne.

Portraits

of the

Eighteenth Century

Historic and Literary

By

C. A. Saint-Beuve

Translated by

Katharine P. Wormeley

With a Critical Introduction by

Edmond Scherer

With 27 Illustrations

G. P. Putnam's Sons
New York and London
The Knickerbocker Press

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Made in the United States of America

Portraits

of the

Eighteenth Century

Historic and Literary

Part I

Duchesse du Maine—Mme. de Staal—Le Sage—Montesquieu—Adrienne Le Couvreur—Voltaire—Mme. Du Deffand—Chesterfield—Mme. Geoffrin—Franklin—Louis XV.—Abbé Barthélemy

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Portraits

of the

Eighteenth Century

Historic and Literary

Part I

Translator's Note.

In the following essays—taken from the *Causeries du Lundi,* the *Portraits de Femmes,* and the *Portraits Littéraires*—certain passages have been omitted, which relate chiefly to editions that have long passed away, or to discussions on style. Also, where two or more essays on the same person have appeared in the different series, they are here put together, omitting repetitions. The article on Louis XV in this volume, for instance, is compiled from four of Saint-Beuve's articles.

The *Causeries du Lundi* are published in fifteen volumes; eleven of which contain the first series; the other four volumes contain the later, or ***nouveaux Lundis.***

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Introduction.

Sainte-Beuve.

BY

M. Edmond Scherer.

THE death of a man like Sainte-Beuve produces two effects. The first is, to make him greater; he is no longer there, we have suddenly become his posterity: he appears to us a being slightly raised above this humanity with which he has henceforth nothing in common. The other effect is the impression of sadness that we always feel in beholding the end of something memorable.

Sainte-Beuve was one of the last representatives of an epoch. He made part of that assemblage of statesmen, orators, poets, artists, who appeared in France, as if by enchantment, after the fall of the Empire. He had his distinctive place in the front rank. Sainte-Beuve was not less decidedly the first of our modern critics than Serre and Berryer were our first orators, Lamartine and Victor Hugo our first poets, Ingres and Delacroix our greatest painters. So, in departing to-day, he seems to carry with him all that still remained of that memorable era, and to mark with a funeral

stone the end of a period gone henceforth into the number of the things that are no more.

But it is not only a choir of immortal artists who have passed from the scene, it is more than that; it is a manner of conceiving the things of the mind that ceases, a literature which departs. Sainte-Beuve was the last of the *littérateurs* in the former sense of the word. We shall never again see writers solely occupied with the things of the intellect, and writing of these with grace and good taste. I would I were mistaken, but it seems to me that the pen, in future, is to serve more especially two classes of men—the money-makers and the amusers; on the one hand, the language of business; on the other, that of violent effects and puerile surprises.

Sainte-Beuve began by poesy; and he clung to his claim to be accepted as a poet. It would, in fact, be unjust not to respect such claim. I have never opened his volumes of verse without forgetting myself in them, as we forget ourselves and stray in autumn through woodland paths; for there is, in those volumes, if not poesy itself, at least so keen a sentiment and so sincere an intention of poesy. In other respects, especially in his experiments, Sainte-Beuve undoubtedly failed in his verses. He attempted to give us a new style. After enjoying early in life the English descriptive poets, Cowper, Coleridge, Wordsworth, he desired to make us all seek the wholly simple and artless poesy of things, the poesy that exhales from

all about us if we have but the eye to see and the soul to feel it. A walk, the reading of a book, a meeting in the street, seemed to him enough to stir the imagination. He dreamed of a middle region, if I may venture so to speak, between the grand poetic flights and the kindly, familiar style of daily life.

Foreigners, Schiller and Goethe, for instance, in their correspondence, have reproached French poesy with being nothing more than eloquence; now, Sainte-Beuve—as perhaps it has not been sufficiently noticed—was altogether a stranger to this oratorical bent of our nation. He was absolutely without that gift of rhetoric which is always the foundation of our best talent. He had neither eloquence, nor exaggeration, nor rhythm. When he spoke in public, his speeches were hardly more than newspaper articles. When he wrote in prose, he dislocated his sentences as he pleased: he seemed to avoid accepted methods of harmony and completeness. And the same in his poetry: breaks, clauses begun in one verse and ending in the next, nothing musical; it seems, if our language had allowed it, that he would rather have written in blank verse.

We have Sainte-Beuve's own judgment on his poetic work. "I have risen near to the summit," I heard him say, "but I have never gone beyond it, and in France we must go beyond." Subtile and true!

The poet, moreover,—and in this is the clearest of

his results in that line,—the poet, in Sainte-Beuve, benefited the critic. With what penetrating taste he judged our poet-authors! With what inward sympathy he welcomed the verses of our contemporaries, those of the young men especially! With what experience and what authority he spoke to them of their art! Sainte-Beuve is the only great critic of poesy that we have ever had. But I anticipate; we have not yet reached the critic.

Sainte-Beuve was, all his life, a journalist; he chose to be that only. His works, excepting two or three, are all collections of articles. It was his natural and favourite manner of working. He needed, if I am not mistaken, the stimulant of immediate publication. We must therefore not expect to find among his papers the sketched-out work that most writers have in their portfolios. But although, during the last twenty years of his life, Sainte-Beuve confined himself to literary articles in the newspapers, he had not always done so. In the *Globe,* at the beginning of his career, and later in the *National,* he wrote politics—the politics of a young man, liberal, ardent, aggressive, which are now easy enough to bring into contradiction with his attitude in after years. And this leads me to speak of the adherence that Sainte-Beuve gave to the Second Empire; the most illustrious, assuredly, that the *coup d' État* of 1851 obtained, and all the more signal because other men of Letters, generally and honourably, refused to give their ap-

proval to that deed of violence. For my part, I do not think it difficult to understand the choice made by Sainte-Beuve, however unfortunate and mistaken that choice may have been. The side he took touched certain profound instincts that were in him. His choice was not, as might be supposed, the effect of the temperament of a man of Letters, easily alarmed by public agitations. Nor do I think it necessary to put his passing Cæsarism to the score of scepticism; to that distrust of human nature which insinuates itself so readily into the minds of those who have seen much of men and have gone through several revolutions.

Liberalism is one of two things: either a sort of religious faith, all the more robust because it is a matter of youth, the result of an illimitable need of action; or else the effect of a reasoned belief, confidence in the immanent power of ideas, the conviction that truth being, in the long run, conformed to the nature of things, needs only full light and equal weapons to triumph. Let us add that truth *is* not, it makes itself; it ceaselessly frees itself from the struggle of opposing ideas; so that, in fact, that struggle is the essence of truth, contradiction is its life; the sole thing it asks from gods and men is the tussle of opinions—in other words, simply liberty. Sainte-Beuve evidently did not share either the blind faith of the liberal by temperament, or the reasoned faith of the speculative liberal. Far from it; he was afraid

of liberty on account of certain liberties that were dear to him. He did not think that in French society, constituted as it is, the game could be always equal. For instance, he asked himself whether, with a powerful and organised clergy, *bourgeois* classes lacking deep culture, and, below, a populace that could not read—whether, with those conditions, obscurantism was not too strong to be dislodged by the Voltaires, or even by the Renans.

But that which dominated Sainte-Beuve in this line of ideas, and made him less fervent for liberty than became a man of thought, was, assuredly, one of the honourable feelings of his nature. He had, in the highest degree, *humanity*. He was touched by the sufferings of the multitude; and the lessening of those sufferings seemed to him the highest duty and also the greatest interest of society. Under the influence of these conceptions, he made short work of all other considerations, short work also of the difficulties offered by the nature of things. We see here how it was that he felt attraction for such thinkers as Proudhon; he was predisposed to believe they were right because they promised to cure evils over which his compassionate soul quivered. We can understand, also, how his mind was able to accept the vision of a strong power; a beneficent dictatorship, which, deriving its rights from the very grandeur of its task, would guide the nation strenuously towards its new social destinies. I have always smiled at the miscon-

ception, when I have seen the ultra-democratic party affect contempt for a writer who, more delicate certainly and less assertive, was nevertheless one with all its generous aspirations and its ideas on the duties of authority. Sainte-Beuve, moreover, as there is no need to recall here, was not long in comprehending how much illusion there was in his hopes. He saw that the saving genius had not appeared, and that the safe way was still to cling to the liberty of all, and to all the liberties. Toward the close of his life the conversion,—or, shall I say, the disenchantment?—was about complete.

After all, what remains, and will ever remain of Sainte-Beuve, is literary criticism. In that lie his originality, his claims, his incontestable supremacy. In that line he stands first, or, rather, alone; for the effect of his writings has been to cause all those who preceded him to be forgotten. To what a distance he has brought us from those vain theoretical discussions and sterile debates over the merits and defects of authors! I know not if some new critic may not come, in his turn, to take the place of Sainte-Beuve,—that is the law of things human,—but meanwhile, we can no longer make our judgment on works of the mind under any other form than that of which he has given us the model.

His vocation was early manifested. He tried his hand at criticism when he tried it in poesy. He did it in the *Globe;* he did it in his *Joseph Delorme;* he

began, as early as 1829, in the *Revue de Paris,* those "literary portraits" which were soon after continued in the *Revue des Deux Mondes,* and which constitute his first manner. But here we touch a delicate subject, and one to which Sainte-Beuve attached much importance; we must therefore pause, for a moment, over his early life.

He was, as we know, to have been a physician. In 1826, when twenty-two years old, he lived with his mother in the rue de Vaugirard, and followed his medical studies as an *externe* in the hospital of Saint-Louis. He had a little room for study in the rue de Lancry; he made up his bed himself, and was so alone in those days of his youth, he used to say, that for three months at a time no one entered his room. His mother clung to this study of medicine as to a certain and solid thing; he himself took to it half-heartedly. He was not satisfied with the instruction he received. The best result of his work in this line was a certain fund of practical physiological knowledge, memories of Bichat, Lamarck, and Cabanis, which came back to him after his mystical phase, and remained, thenceforth, as a sort of background to his thoughts of life and the world.

It was in these years that he began to write verses. In 1827 he stayed with friends in England, he "bathed in the Thames," he read the poets, those whose style he afterwards attempted to introduce into our language. He was employed, about this time, on the *Globe,* for

which he wrote criticisms: "not bad," he said, "but dry." Daunou, however, encouraged him to work for an open competition on the poetic literature of the sixteenth century: he lent him books and the young man set to work. Can we not see him, at that early age of twenty-two, already studious and curious, interrogating his talent and his destiny?

Destiny replied to him. Meanwhile, he made the acquaintance of Victor Hugo. The second volume of *Odes et Ballades* had just appeared (1826); Sainte-Beuve was to write an article on it, and he went to see the poet, who lived near by, in fact, within two doors of the critic. The latter owned to the poet that he, too, made verses; he showed some, received good advice, and behold the two young men bound inseparably together, and Sainte-Beuve renouncing medicine for Letters; he used to say that he never even went to the hospital to get his instruments.

Some time later, Hugo having changed his lodgings, Sainte-Beuve followed him, and they ended by living in the same house. This intimacy exercised over this part of our friend's life an influence that he never sought to conceal. He gave himself up to poesy, to friendship, to zealous ardour for the dawning romantic creed. The years from 1827 to 1830 rolled by in a sort of enthusiastic devotion, of which the preface to *Consolations* has preserved to us the lyric note; it was something like the relations of master and disciple at the period of the Renaissance, a need on the

part of the latter to make himself humble and small, and to defer in all things to the pontiff of the new faith. This preface should be read again ; and all the more because Sainte-Beuve, if I am not mistaken, found difficulty, later, in forgiving himself for it ; recovering from that fervour, as did others, he was angry with himself for having ceased for a period to belong to himself ; his literary and moral taste suffered from it.

From 1830, a little coolness came between the friends. To this politics contributed. Other sentiments had taken possession of Sainte-Beuve and thrown him into a crisis during which, agitated and distressed, he tried many things, took up the most conflicting ideas, addressed himself to the new prophets, frequented Lamennais, Lacordaire, etc. From this crisis came *Volupté* ("all the characters are portraits, very exactly painted") and much poetry, of which the *Pensées d'Août* contain some, and the old collections contain others, but which are for the most part unpublished. "There are thirty or so which I will give you to read," he said, "and then you can burn them."

Thus, from 1825 to 1830, devotion to romanticism in the person of its great leader, and, from 1830 to 1836, a period of passion and fever,—in short, a period of ten years, to which Sainte-Beuve often made allusion, saying that if he then alienated his will, it was through "the effect of a spell." He was very

solicitous to make it understood that during that period he was not yet himself; that he followed romanticism farther than his later judgment approved; in a word, and according to his own expression, criticism was not yet awakened in him. It was, as it were, held in check by his affections. But the affections themselves, oh, sorrow! had their disenchantment and their end. Sainte-Beuve left Paris for Lausanne. This was the close of the poetic and passionate period of his life. At Lausanne he planned and sketched out *Port Royal*, the first fruits of his new literary activity.

The "History of Port-Royal" occupies a very important place in the life of Sainte-Beuve. He had already written articles in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and elsewhere, but nothing very distinctive: "praises, complaisance, foregone conclusions." The subject that he now chose brought him for the first time to grapple with real historical study. In so doing he trained himself to research, to exactitude. He developed the qualities that he brought to this, his first important work — psychological intelligence, infinite suppleness, and facility. At every step he met great literary figures; he avoided none; on the contrary, he knew how to bring them powerfully into his picture. Thus it was that Sainte-Beuve, on this monastic subject, broke himself in, as it were, for his future work; the apprenticeship was thorough. He published at the same time many of his *Portraits*, contemporary

and other, which have long been his title to distinction as a critic, and had then already made a place apart for him, and a lofty place, before the *Lundis* came to make him another, and a greater.

The *Causeries du Lundi* are, I do not hesitate to say it, one of the most extraordinary works of which literary history has preserved a memory. The work is as amazing for its extent as for the variety of its subjects, as vast in the toil that gave it birth as for the talent that is shown in it. All subjects are there: the ancients and the contemporaries; the gravest beside gayest; foreigners as well as Frenchmen; prose and poesy, eloquence and history; Bourdaloue and d'Aguesseau rubbing shoulders with Musset and Parny; and with it all, endless original research, notes made on documents, curious delvings into unexplored domains. One needs to have known Sainte-Beuve personally to comprehend the importance, the almost morbid importance he attached to the spelling of a name, to the correctness of a quotation or a date. He wished to see everything with his own eyes, to verify everything. He had truly the religion of Letters.

From the time when the *Lundis* began, his whole life was governed by the conditions of the task he had undertaken. Those marvellous articles came from the cell of a Benedictine monk. Sainte-Beuve's door was closed, except on Monday, the day of publication, which was made a day of rest and holiday. The

books he needed for his work were collected in advance in the public libraries by devoted friends. The readings from them made, the passages noted, he made a first sketch of his article; then he "built it," as he used to say. After which, he corrected every part of it, and began to write it, dictating to his secretary, snatching the pen himself now and then, interlining, modifying, bettering. The whole conscience of the scholar and artist was on the *qui vive* during this labour, and to the last moment. On Friday the article was finished: Sainte-Beuve drew breath; he went to read his work to Véron (I speak of the first *Lundis,* those of 1849 and the following years), whose *bourgeois* tact he valued; after which he stayed to dinner with Véron and a few friends. The task was not finished, however; after the printing came the correction of proofs, of which two, sometimes three, were needed to satisfy his requirements. Saturday and Sunday were passed thus, and then the next week was already there with its new article to sketch out. Such is the cost of perfect things, of lasting things!

Sainte-Beuve continued this task without interruption for five years; after which, the occasion arising, he started the work anew, and pursued it more persistently than ever. Later, there was, now and then, a little relaxing; as, for instance, when he became Master of Conferences at the École Normale. Towards the last, illness stopped the work at times. But it is

mainly none the less true that he pursued it for twenty years, and laid down the critic's pen only with his life.

I have too often, on too many occasions, spoken of Sainte-Beuve's talent to feel the need of dwelling upon it to-day. I am only struck with one thing at this moment when his career lies there, completed, before us. Progress, in him, was continual, but it was slow ; as it is, they say, in the development of all superior life. He needed time to reach the full possession of his genius. But then, how all things in him ever tended to that end! What perseverance in effort ! What incessant progression! What distance from his first style to that which he attained in after years! but already, in the first, what visible struggle to conquer the language, to chain the Proteus! What sincerity of intention ! What need to satisfy himself and himself above all! Sainte-Beuve *grew* to the last; and he had no falling back ; he is almost the only one of our men of letters who sacrificed absolutely nothing to the requirements of trade, who gave way to no mannerism, who assumed as he grew older neither trick nor pose. To the last, he remained faithful to an heroic work, to an artist's conscience, to respect for his own talent : Sainte-Beuve is the model for men of Letters.

I perceive that I have said nothing of what was, perhaps, the most extraordinary feature of his works. Here are twenty-five volumes of the *Lundis;* add to

those the *Portraits,* the *Port-Royal,* the *Chateaubriand,* and we have forty volumes of literary criticism. Well, the writer never repeated himself. He always had something fresh to say, and he always said it in a skilful and piquant manner. I know no writer who can give us such an appetite as he. We open him at random, we read him, and we cannot close the book. He disappears so completely behind his subject ; and when he does show himself it is with so many ideas, often with a stroke so happy, a word so apposite, so decisive !—a Montaigne turned critic, as one might say. Searching, sensible, judicious, without a shadow of charlatanism, returned from all misleadings ; more sceptical than indifferent ; occasionally with a biting sarcasm, with here and there a flower of poesy—such are the books of Sainte-Beuve.

He has been blamed for injustice. I am convinced, on the contrary, that never was a critic more equitable. He had his passions no doubt ; but passions are the man himself, the living expression of his moral nature ; and repugnances, in Sainte-Beuve, were usually only the revolt of his taste and his literary honesty against mediocrities, pretensions, and affectations. There are authors who count for much in our literature whom he never enjoyed ; some because they were not artists enough to suit him, others because he understood art in a different way from theirs, and he suffered too much from their defects to enjoy their beauties. Apart from that, he was possessed

with the desire to be just, and he was so, by the natural effect of his literary conscience. He felt that all judgment was necessarily provisional and partial; that the only means of rendering it less imperfect was to rectify it, fill it out, complete it, and for that purpose, to return to it, once, twice, constantly. He was convinced, in general, that "all saying has its counter-saying"; that men, in particular, have a right side and a wrong side, he felt himself obliged to show the one after showing the other. Hence these several portraits of the same personage, which he took up anew, changing the tone and the point of view; hence the retouches, the notes, the correction so near to the assertion. Sainte-Beuve, contrary to what those who have not followed him closely suppose, was one of the critics whose judgments have been least influenced by considerations outside of literature itself.

And now we must take leave of him, of that lucid intellect, of that wonderful writer, that charming talker, that indulgent friend; we must bid him again the last farewell with which we bowed before him yesterday, as we saw the grave close over him![1] Happy shall we be if the melancholy natural forebodings at such a moment are not realised! Happy if the death of a man who has held so high a place in our literature is not at the same time the end of a literary era; if delicacy and taste, deprived of their

[1] Written in October, 1869, at the time of Sainte-Beuve's death.

last representative, do not vanish with him ; if the royalty of letters is not fated to pass away like the other royalties, and give place to general mediocrity and violent methods. I have often had the impression that Sainte-Beuve, towards the end, felt himself homeless in the midst of the new tendencies ; it is inevitable, perhaps, that when we lose a man like him, we should imagine that all is ended, whereas it may be only that all is being transformed.

The Duchesse du Maine.

The Duchesse du Maine.

THE DUCHESSE DU MAINE was a species of fairy, and one of the most singular: she deserves to be studied, she and her princely existence, in her little Court of Sceaux, where she comes before us as one of the extreme and most fantastic productions of the reign of Louis XIV, of the monarchical *régime* carried to excess.

Born in 1676, the Duchesse Du Maine died in 1753, not quite one hundred years ago. In those hundred years a great revolution has taken place in the order and governance of society, in the whole body of public manners and morals, so that the existence and life led by this fantastic little queen seems to us like an Arabian Night's tale, and we ask ourselves seriously: "Was it ever possible?" La Bruyère foresaw and foretold something of this fundamental change when he said: "While the grandees of the land neglect all knowledge of—I will not say the interests of princes and of public affairs only, but of their own affairs; while they ignore domestic economy and science of the father of the home, and boast of that ignorance, citizens are instructing themselves in and out of the

kingdom, becoming shrewd and politic, learning the strength and the weakness of all things in the State, they are thinking of bettering their position, they rise, they become powerful, they relieve the Prince of a part of his public cares. The grandees who disdained them now revere them, and think themselves fortunate to become their sons-in-law." This revolution, which La Bruyère thus foretold under a form of compromise and friendly agreement, was not, as we all know, so peaceable. La Bruyère, out of courtesy, said of the grandees what he would not have ventured to say of princes. The newcomers on the social stage have not always been as conciliating as the *parvenus* of La Bruyère's time. The new state of things did not end in a marriage, and, from '89 to 1850, the equilibrium between what remains of the essence of the old society and the increasing claims of the new society is still being sought.

The Duchesse du Maine, with all her wit and cleverness, had no suspicion of all this, and never put such questions before her mind; she believed in her birthrights, in her prerogatives of demigod, just as firmly as she believed in Descartes's system and her Catechism.

Louise Bénédicte de Bourbon was a granddaughter of the Great Condé. Her brother, M. le Duc, had La Bruyère for his tutor, and she may, in some respects, have profited thereby. In excellence of language, in wit, in eagerness for knowledge, she early showed that she had, like her brother, sparks of the intellect

DUCHESSE DU MAINE.

From a copper engraving.

of her grandfather. But it is to be remarked that the soul of a hero, when it is shared and broken up among his descendants, sometimes produces very singular beings, and even strange, abnormal ones. Everything is on a great scale in great souls, vices as well as virtues. Defects which, in the hero, were balanced and held in check by lofty qualities, reveal themselves all of a sudden in his descendants, and seem excessive. The Great Condé, at the bottom of his soul, had none of that natural kindness — *bonté*—for which Bossuet lauded him; but his great mind and his valiant heart covered a multitude of things. He was not to be opposed at certain times; violent and despotic in temper, he was easily irritated by contradiction, even when the matter concerned only topics of the mind. Boileau perceived this one day when he differed from him in some discussion: "In future," he said, "I shall always be of the same opinion as M. le Prince, especially when he is wrong."

In general, the descendants of the Great Condé (history may say it to-day, for the race is extinct) were not kind. Brutality, carried to ferocity, characterised the one called M. le Duc (the grandson), and also that other M. le Duc, the first prime-minister of the Regency; it was startling in the Comte de Charolais. Violence, impossibility of bearing contradiction, were vehement, even frantic traits in all of them. But the mind of the great ancestor held its own with distinction, and was distributed as if in

brilliant portions among his posterity. The Duchesse du Maine was one of those who were best supplied with it. It is noticeable that already, in the grandchildren, the race was becoming physically impoverished; their forms showed it. The Duchesse du Maine, as well her sisters, was almost a dwarf; she was the tallest of the family, but did not look to be more than ten years old. When the Duc du Maine married her, having to choose among the daughters of M. le Prince, he chose this one because she was, perhaps, a fraction taller than her elder sisters. They were never called, in familiar talk, the "princesses of the blood" but the "dolls of the blood."

The Duc du Maine, who, in 1692, at twenty-two years of age, married this granddaughter of the Great Condé, aged sixteen, was the eldest of the bastards of Louis XIV and Mme. de Montespan. The little prince, tenderly brought up by Mme. de Maintenon, who was a true mother to him, had been formed and trained on the ideals of the foundress of Saint-Cyr. He had intelligence, an excellent gift of language, gentleness and charm in private life, and the habit of discretion and submission; in a word, he was one of those youths who are early perfected, who never emancipate themselves, and who never altogether become men. He was club-footed, a constitutional blemish which increased his natural shyness in society. Well-educated, but without real

intelligence, he was destined never, in the region of ideas, to go beyond the narrow horizon by which he had been hemmed in from infancy. The duchess, eager, bold, imperious, and fantastic, was destined never to go beyond that horizon herself; and all her audacity, all her flights of fantasy, were confined within the artificial and magical sphere in which she kept herself excited, without a thought beyond it.

On the day when Louis XIV, yielding to his son's desire, gave him permission to marry, he could not restrain the remark, full of the common sense of his royal conviction: "*Such persons* ought never to marry." He foresaw the confusion and the conflicts which this equivocal race of "legitimatised bastards" might bring into the monarchical system, which was then the whole constitution of the State. He yielded, however, and toward the last he did his best to increase that confusion by the favours and prerogatives which he never ceased to heap upon these adulterous and parasitic offspring.

No sooner was she married, than the little duchess took her timid husband in hand, and subjected him in all things to her will. She dreamed of future glory, of political grandeur and power; meanwhile she chose to live as she pleased, and in as much sovereign state as she could compass; doing as little as possible for others, gratifying all her caprices, and setting up a Court of her own where no rival star could shine. This dream of her imagination was not

fully realised until the Duc du Maine purchased the estate of Sceaux from the heirs of M. de Seïgnelay, at a cost of 900,000 *livres*. There she made her Chantilly, her Marly, her Versailles in miniature (1700).

Among the tutors of the Duc du Maine there had been a M. de Malezieu, a well-educated man, knowing mathematics, literature, Greek and Latin, improvising verses, planning theatricals, understanding something of business, and "combining in his servile position," says Lemontey, "the advantages of a universal mediocrity." This M. de Malezieu, who became the indispensable personage of the Court of the duchess, its oracle in all matters, and of whom they said at Sceaux, as, in the olden time, of Pythagoras, "The Master says it," must certainly have had more than one good quality, but it is difficult to-day to form a just idea of his merits. Member of two Academies, that of the Sciences and also of the French Academy, he was extolled by Fontenelle, who, however, did not overdo the matter, and shows him to us, with his "robust and fiery temperament," sufficing for all petty employments. Voltaire, more critical, speaks of him as a man in whom great erudition had not extinguished genius: "He sometimes took up before your Serene Highness" (Mme. du Maine) "a Sophocles, a Euripides, and translated on the spot into French one of their tragedies. The admiration, the enthusiasm that possessed him, inspired him with words and ex-

pressions which rendered well the manly and harmonious vigour of the Greek verse, as much as it was possible to approach it in the prose of a language lately issued from barbarism. . . . Nevertheless, M. de Malezieu, by efforts that called forth immediate enthusiasm, and by vehement recitation, seemed to make up for the poverty of our language, and to put into his declamation the very soul of the great men of Athens."

That is a eulogy which ought to give a high idea of the man; but we must not forget that Voltaire expresses himself thus in a Dedicatory Letter. The Memoirs of Mme. de Staal (de Launay) show us M. de Malezieu in a less favourable light, as ceremonious, demonstrative, and dull, without much discernment when discernment was not useful to him, and with a mind that needed the help of a little heart. M. de Malezieu was, to all appearance, one of those men who derive activity from a robust temperament, combining shrewdness with energy; and who, having an extensive and solid fund of early knowledge which they never increase, devote themselves solely to putting that knowledge to use in society, and to getting a profit out of it from the great. He was a man of intelligence and education, who could appear a genius only to a small coterie. That coterie he found at Sceaux, and, by dint of constant activity and invention, he was able to fill it, for more than twenty-five years, with the idea of his great attainments and

sublimity. At three leagues from Paris people called him, without laughing, the great Malezieu!

M. de Malezieu had been one of the principal causes of the purchase of Sceaux. Already rich through the bounty of the Court, he owned a pretty country-house at Châtenay, where he received the Duchesse du Maine, who honoured him with a visit in the summer of 1699, and to whom he gave a gallant hospitality. She stayed there, being pregnant, during the whole sojourn of the Court at Fontainebleau. Games, fêtes, fireworks in her honour, were continual, and all was managed with a certain air of innocence, as of the Golden Age. The populace of the neighbourhood took part in these pleasures by songs and dances ; the country was then tasting the first sweets of the Peace of Ryswick. The duchess then and there made her début into that life of fairyland and mythology in which she took such delight that soon she would have no other ; and then it was that the idea came into her head to take possession of the whole valley. The description of this first visit given by the Abbé Genest, a colleague of Malezieu, and addressed to Mlle. de Scudéry, is quite piquant, and shows us the origin of that long play at pastorals which soon after became the very existence of the duchess. Romantic "surprises" attended her every step ; innocent amusements at all hours : they played at nymphs and shepherdesses ; they prepared for future prodigality by playing at economy. "M. le Duc du Maine," says

the narrative, "complained when he left off playing that he had lost ten *livres;* the princesses boasted of their luck in having won nearly as much." In these fêtes, and in others that followed in the same place in succeeding years, we see M. de Malezieu doing the honours charmingly, and giving life as universal manager to the whole of that little sphere. No wonder that he was thought worthy of being in himself the Molière, the Descartes, the Pythagoras, of that kingdom of Lilliput!

The Duchesse du Maine, said Fontenelle, insisted that even in amusements there should be an idea, an invention, and that "joy should have wit." When we read to-day the narrative of these fêtes in the collection entitled "The Diversions at Sceaux," we recognise, in the midst of the insipidity, that M. de Malezieu did supply the mental quality that the fairy demanded.

Soon the whole of the pretty valley of Sceaux became the park of the duchess, her pastoral kingdom, her vale of Tempe. She never appeared that the "Sylvain of Châtenay," and the "Nymph of Aulnay," did not come to pay homage in person; there was not a spot, even as far as Plessis-Piquet, without its rural divinity. The Abbé Genest had selected his hermitage, whence he came to offer his devotions to "Our Lady of Sceaux."

But, who was this Abbé Genest? Oh! something very singular and very amusing, I assure you; the

least solemn of the French academicians (for he belonged to the Forty), and the most difficult to eulogise at their public session. D'Olivet supplemented the official eulogy by a private letter. The Abbé Genest was, like Socrates, the son of a midwife; he began life in business as a peddler, then he was a prisoner, then copyist, tutor, horse-jockey, secretary to the Duc de Nevers ; witty and well-informed through it all, and making verses with ease and natural gaiety. He received first the second prize and then the first prize for poesy in 1671 and 1673 ; that made him known. He curried favour with Pellisson, and, through him, with the Dauphin's tutors, Bossuet and others. He took part in the conference on physics of the famous Rohault, and, through some queer notion, he set to work at putting Descartes's philosophy into verse. Finally he came to know M. de Malezieu, who enjoyed him, utilised him, and made him his confederate in the games and poetical diversions of society. The Abbé Genest was to princes what they have liked in all ages (even our own), a mixture of poet and buffoon. He was laughed at, and gave occasion for it ; he had a very remarkable disfigurement, which did no harm to his fortunes : his nose was immense, so immense that apparently we can form no idea of it. Many a time the Duc de Bourgogne and the Duc du Maine, when schoolboys, joked about their tutor's nose. Louis XIV himself gave way once, and laughed a natural laugh at one of the

pranks played upon the abbè with that stupendous nose. They even went so far as to find an anagram in his name, Charles Genest—*Eh, c'est large nez*. I skip, out of propriety, many jests relating to a totally different matter—how shall I mention it?—relating to the too habitual and very incomplete manner in which the Abbé Genest, in his absent-minded moments, was accustomed to fasten the garment that the English never name. Thanks to his merits so real and diverse, the facetious abbé was in demand at Châtenay, Sceaux, and Saint-Maur, for all the rural and bucolic fêtes :

> Among the sylvan gods, forget not
> Him who weareth bands and black coat
> . . . . . .
> With that coat and with that nose,
> That nose that measures two feet long,
> He surely must be pedagogue of Fauns.

But this is nonsense. Let us resume our subject without further frivolity. The Duchesse du Maine studied the philosophy of Descartes with M. de Malezieu ; with him and by him she read Virgil, Terence, Sophocles, Euripides ; and before long she was able to read some of those authors, the Latins at least, in the original. Moreover, she studied astronomy, always with that font of universal knowledge, M. de Malezieu, who knew more than was needed to explain "The Plurality of Worlds" by Fontenelle. She applied her eyes to the telescope, and also to the microscope ; in short, she studied everything, by fits and

starts, out of passion or caprice, but without becoming one whit more enlightened in general. Through it all she played shepherdess and pastorals by day and by night ; supplied ideas to be made into madrigals by her two scribblers, the eternal Malezieu and the Abbé Genest ; invited and gathered about her a crowd of elect, set them to work, wearied them to extinction, allowed no delay in carrying out her desires, and kept herself in movement with impish energy, for fear of having to reflect, or of being bored for a single instant. As for sleep in the midst of these vigils and distractions, there was no question of it ; the duchess was persuaded that it was necessary only for common mortals.

From the literary point of view, which, whether from far or near, must be ours, the mischief of this rush of tumultuous life was that of being incompatible with good taste. Good taste examines, discerns ; it has its periods of repose ; it selects. In this case, natural intelligence did all, but discerned nothing, selected nothing ; in her theatricals the duchess played indiscriminately "Athalie," "Iphigenia in Tauris" (faithfully translated from Euripides), or Azaneth, wife of Joseph, in the tragedy of "Joseph" written by the Abbé Genest.

What did it signify to her, provided she kept up a constant turmoil, gave way to all her emotions, and reigned supreme? People compared her to the great queens who have loved knowledge,—to Queen Chris-

tina, to Elizabeth, Princess Palatine, the friend of Descartes, and gave her the pre-eminence. President de Mesmes (premier-president of the Parliament) addressed to her with a new-year's gift, verses which he had caused to be written in the chivalric and Marotic style (the fashion of the moment), in which he styled himself "The very powerful Emperor of Hindustan," writing to the "more than perfect Princess Ludovisa, Empress of Sceaux." On both sides the masquerade was perfect. Even when she looked into her mirror the duchess thought herself beautiful; though she could not deny that she was short. At the time of her marriage an emblem and a motto had been devised for her: a honey-bee, with these words from Tasso: *Piccola si, ma fa pur gravi le ferite*—Small she is, but she gives cruel wounds. This gave rise, in the early days of Sceaux, to the formation of a society of the persons who most often had the honour of being invited there, under the name of the Order of the Honey-bee. Rules and regulations were drawn up, statutes were framed, a medal was struck for the occasion which those of the Order were to wear suspended to a lemon-coloured ribbon, whenever they went to Sceaux. This mark of distinction was much coveted. Thirty-nine persons were appointed and took the required oath, swearing "by Mount Hymettus." On this occasion they played at being Greek.

But now, Louis XIV's last war, the War of the

Spanish Succession, was lighted, and all Europe was in a blaze; fortune was beginning to turn against France; the people were exhausted by taxes and bloodshed; the Duc du Maine failed to distinguish himself by valour on the battlefield; but at Sceaux the duchess, radiant with hope and pride, played her plays and continued to amuse herself. "She swam," says Saint-Simon, "in the joy of her future grandeur." The full glory, the splendour of what were called the "Grand Nights of Sceaux," belong to these very years of disaster. The scandal of such fêtes and ruinous amusements became all the greater, or at least more notorious, when the misfortunes of the royal family were added to those of France. But the death of the chief direct heirs brought the Duc du Maine nearer to power, and even to the throne; every rung the less in the ladder of legitimate succession was one step higher on the ladder of his fortune. We know now that Louis XIV's weakness, beset by that of Mme. de Maintenon, the foster-mother more than mother of the Duc du Maine, would in the end equalise in all things the bastards with the legitimate princes of the blood, and declare them, definitively, capable of succeeding to the throne. His last will, had it been followed, would have given to the Duc du Maine the highest influence in the future Regency.

Curious readers can look into the Collection called that of Maurepas (Bibliothèque Nationale), for the couplets and savage squibs with which the Duc and Du-

chesse du Maine were assailed on the occasion of these odious favours; they are not very witty, and, in general, are too indecent to be quoted here. Many are the scurrilous comments on the duchess, whose own poets always spoke of her as "the modern Penelope." I shall only say two words on that delicate subject. M. le Duc (de Bourbon), own brother of the Duchesse du Maine, had, at one time, a great fancy for her; such fancies were not rare in the family of the Condés. The brother and sister exchanged, from Saint-Maur to Sceaux, gallant sentiments, which the duchess made Malezieu and Genest put into rhyme, while Chaulieu and La Fare did the same for M. le Duc. At last, however, the couple quarrelled, but much gossip and many songs had already been spread abroad.

After these first attacks on the score of M. le Duc, something was said, but rather mildly, about President de Mesmes, whom the duchess desired to attach to herself in order that she might rule the Parliament through him. But Cardinal de Polignac seems to have been the favourite most in evidence, and some have gone so far as to quote parts of letters that would seem to be decisive proof. That cardinal, so agreeable in person and so much of a wit, appears to have been made expressly for the little Court *à la Rambouillet.* He was always busy with his great poem of "Anti-Lucrèce," in which he maintained in Latin verse the soundest principles of theology and morality. He read it, he explained it to the duchess, and M. du Maine

took pleasure in translating the songs. One day when the prince brought a song he had translated to his wife, she said impatiently: "You will wake up some fine morning and find yourself in the French Academy, and M. d'Orléans Regent of the kingdom."

Ambition brooded in her, beneath this life of games and comedies. In that pigmy body, in that epitome of the Great Condé, lay sparks of the same civic madness. Of humane sentiment or of patriotism in these superior beings, who think themselves of the lineage of Jupiter, there is no question whatever; the nation and the world were made for them; they believe this sincerely, and they act loftily in consequence. On the eve of the Regency (1714), Mme. du Maine made a declaration to two dukes and peers, whom she had summoned to Sceaux to talk over *eventualities*—as we should say and as she did not say, for if she thought wrong she at least spoke better than we do. She wanted to secure for herself a party in the Parliament, and obtain support there in the event of any quibbles being raised against the rights which she believed the Duc du Maine had now acquired under the king's will. Seeing that those she addressed were reserved and on their guard, she flew into a passion (as she always did when she encountered the slightest opposition), and told them that "when once the power of succeeding to the throne was obtained, rather than let it be torn from them, they would, if need be, throw the kingdom into a blaze from its centre to its four

corners." There is the Great Condé himself! Louis XIV dead and his will broken, furious with anger, she did not rest till she had tried to put those evil words into execution.

All this interrupted somewhat the festivities of Sceaux; and there are two periods, two epochs, in that long, mythological life of pleasure, or, as I call it, that life hemmed between two hedges: the first epoch, that of hopes, of proud intoxication, of ambition concealed beneath the flowers; then the second, after hope had failed, after disappointment and miscalculation—if we can employ those words; for, even after such a fall, after the degradation of rank, after the abortive conspiracy and imprisonment, her incorrigible nature, returning to its accustomed scenes, displayed anew the same pride, the same intoxication, the same absorption in self, the same faculty of active and noisy illusion, so that she actually felt herself still young at seventy years of age, and as much of a shepherdess as ever. Never was any one more naïvely goddess and shepherdess than the Duchesse du Maine. She played the comedy to the very last, never once suspecting that it was comedy.

"Put me, as ever, at the feet of Mme. la Duchesse du Maine," wrote Voltaire from Berlin, in 1752 (she was then seventy-six years old); "hers is an elect soul; she will love comedy to her latest moment, and when she falls ill, I advise you to administer some fine play to her instead of Extreme-unction. People die as

they live. . . . ." To these words we may add, to complete the picture, that, loving comedy as she did, and playing it incessantly, she played it ill, and was none the less applauded.

And now, is there not a serious lesson to be drawn from the picture of such an existence and such a nature, which to-day seem fabulous? It was said of the Duchesse du Maine that "she never, in all her life, came out of her house, nor *so much as put her head out of the window.*" Philosophers, at any rate some philosophers, have imagined that if man, after his birth and his first motions, did not experience resistance by contact with the things about him, he would never be able to distinguish himself from the exterior world, and would come to believe that the world was a part of himself and his own body wherever he extended his hand or his steps. He would, in fact, end by persuading himself that the whole world was only an appendage and an extension of his personal being; so that he would say, in all confidence: "The Universe is I!" Mme. du Maine was such a one; she embodied that dream of the philosophers. She never met with any resistance to her wishes until the period of the Regency. She early put herself into a condition of never meeting with opposition, by shutting herself up in that little Court of Sceaux, where all was hers, and hers alone. Any will other than her own would have seemed to her an impertinence and a rebellion. When she did "come out of her house,"

however, and had to meet real difficulties, she struck against them, and was wrecked. In that mad conspiracy which she undertook out of spite against the Regent (1718), and into which she forced her timid husband, she was obliged to see that the world was larger, more real, more difficult to move than she had thought it. Any other than she would have learned a lesson, or at any rate would have felt some mortification or depression; but the force of her nature and of early impressions carried the day. Returning to Sceaux after a hard experience of humiliation and disgrace (1720), she placed herself again, little by little, in the same conditions in which she had formerly lived; again she found no resistance, and soon forgot there was any for her outside of her own valley. She remained as convinced as ever that the law of the world, when it worked properly, was that all things were for her, and solely for her. In a word, she was like a person who has tumbled by accident out of a first-story window, without much injury, but who, for that reason, never again looks out of a window.

It is possible to speak of Mme. du Maine with certainty and as if we had known her, for we have the most direct, intimate, and sure testimony about her. She took into her service in 1711, under the title of waiting-woman, a person of worth, who was not below any station, who was fitted to be the equal and who was the rival in intellect of the most distinguished persons of her day, uniting gravity to gaiety,

and possessed of a heart that kept its full value, even when time had withered it. Mlle. de Launay remained with her mistress for more than forty years, and left behind her racy Memoirs, which have long been greatly admired for the quality of their language and the charm of the narrative. In reading Mlle. de Launay, and in following her through the various vicissitudes of her menial condition, we say with La Bruyère: "The advantage of Great persons over other men is immense in one particular. I concede to them their high living, their rich furniture, their horses, dogs, monkeys, fools, and flatterers; but I envy them the happiness of having in their service persons who equal them in heart and mind, and often surpass them." Mlle. de Launay herself, who has, perhaps, never yet been given her true rank as moralist, represents to my mind a female La Bruyère, placed in the alcove of her princess. She does not tell all, but she sees all; and by weighing her words, she gives to her observations a more concise and ineffaceable character.

She represents to us marvellously that talent for saying the right thing well which was peculiar to the Duchesse du Maine, and which was the first characteristic that attracted her attention: "I gave it to her wholly and without effort," says Mlle. de Launay; "for no one ever spoke with more correctness, clearness, and fluency, or in a nobler and more natural manner. Her mind employed neither trick

nor figure of speech, nor anything that could be called invention. Forcibly struck by a subject, her mind rendered it as the glass of a mirror reflects, without adding, without omitting, or changing anything." No words could better depict all that was natural, accomplished, and even, in a certain sense, just and correct, in that quick mind and speech, always itself in the midst of her artificial world. Expression, in the Duchesse du Maine, was equal, neither more nor less, to impression; and both were always clear and vivid. "Language is never so perfect as when you speak it, or when people speak of you," Mme. de Lambert wrote to her. Take out the compliment, and the praise is the same as that we have just read.

All those who have written of the Duchesse du Maine, note this "precision" of her mind and the "accuracy" [*justesse*] felt in her brilliancy. In this respect, she belonged to that school at the close of the seventeenth century to which Mme. de Maintenon had taught the lesson that long sentences are a defect.

Mlle. de Launay also initiates us into the long train of caprices, ambitions, and fantastic games of this clever and arbitrary spoilt child. She shows her to us, and shows herself beside her, conspiring all night with her pen, striving, by dint of memorials and letters, to stir up against the Regent a Fronde which should bear the stamp of wit and *bel-esprit*. After the imprisonment of the princess and the waiting-

maid, an imprisonment which did not redound to the honour of the one, but was the glory of the other, Mlle. de Launay, ennobled in the eyes of the world by her constancy, returned to Sceaux with her mistress, who rewarded that constancy by putting her (although with a shade of difference) on the footing of her ladies. Little by little, the miniature Court was repeopled and reanimated; the whirlwind began again. Dream and delirium were soon in full swing. But a rather spicy episode must here find its place when the history of the Queen of Sceaux is written.

Mlle. de Launay, whenever she stayed in Paris, saw much of Mme. de Lambert, and went to her "Tuesdays"—that was the day on which Mme. de Lambert gathered around her Fontenelle, La Motte, Mairan, the Abbé Mongault, and several other academicians and wits. Now it happened that Mlle. de Launay and Mme. de Lambert read, at one of these Tuesdays, letters which they had received from the Duchesse du Maine, who, being informed of the honour done to her letters, pretended to be frightened at their production before so learned and formidable a company. Out of this grew a correspondence between herself and La Metto(1726). The latter was fifty-four years old and blind; the duchess was nearing fifty. The blind wit took to playing lover; Mme. du Maine played artless innocence and pastorals. Presently it became a question of how to make a Serene Highness understand that the lover was in love with her, without pronouncing

the word love, and how to turn and twist that gallant idea to every meaning, and simulate an ardour, still restrained within terms of respect, in order to obtain from her certain favours. The first of these favours was that she should sign her name in full: Louise Bénédicte de Bourbon. La Motte's game was then to say that this signature of Louise Bénédicte de Bourbon could not *last;* giving it to be understood that he was devouring it with kisses, and he begged, clamorously, for another signature. "I have, with your permission, almost worn out the first," he wrote.—O Molière! Molière of *Les Précieuses,* where wert thou? In reading this correspondence, refined to the quintessence of absurdity, we understand the weariness of those who, spending their lives at Sceaux in making wit by night and by day, could not help calling the little Court "the Galleys of Bel-Esprit" and crying for mercy. The charming Prince de Ligne used to say: "I think I should have been bored by the Duchesse du Maine; she had a twist to her mind as well as to her shoulders. Sceaux was the country-house of the hôtel de Rambouillet."

During this second epoch of Sceaux, the duchess placed at the head of those she called her "swains" the witty Marquis de Sainte-Aulaire, who wrote his famous quatrain to her when he was ninety years old; it was very rejuvenating to the duchess to give herself so old a swain; she seemed like a child beside him. She managed to combine, no one exactly knows how,

religion with her various gallant, bucolic, and mythological practices, and one day she requested M. de Sainte-Aulaire to go to confession with her, to which he replied,

> My Shepherdess, in vain I seek,
> Nothing is on my conscience.
> In pity suffer me to sin,
> Then I may feel penitence.

Voltaire was one of the guests, if not one of the swains of Sceaux; and he made certain memorable sojourns there. In the autumn of 1746, having compromised his safety by one of those imprudences that were so habitual with him, he arrived one evening to ask the Duchesse du Maine for an asylum. She hid him in a remote apartment, where the shutters were kept closed all day. Voltaire worked by candle-light, and during the two months he lived in this way he composed a number of his pretty *Contes,* especially "Zadig," and every night he went to read them to the duchess, who, having lost the habit of sleeping, slept less on those nights than ever. Other appearances of Voltaire at the little Court of Sceaux are on record, and all were singular.

In spite of this demand for wit and intellect and for the persons who were best supplied with them, it cannot be said that the influence of the Court of Sceaux was of any benefit to Letters, or that it ever inspired anything. Nothing was felt there of the life-giving and fructifying action that comes from a true

centre. Nothing was seen there but a round of enchantments, planned and directed, to which minds already formed came to lay their homage at the feet of the divinity of the place, and to exert themselves in rivalry to amuse her. To me the most impressive side of the little Court, and the one for which alone it seems to be memorable, is the moral side, the side which affords food for human observation of prejudices, eccentricities, and absurdities. If you wish to study in a perfect specimen, and as if under the microscope, the dainty egotism, the fantastic and coquettish despotism of a princess of the blood in the olden time, and the artless impossibility in which she lives of conceiving any other existence in the world than her own, go to Sceaux; there you will see these gross defects in miniature, just as we see gold-fish moving in the sunshine in a transparent bowl. You will see that spoilt child of sixty and more, to whom experience has taught nothing,—for experience implies reflection and an inward study of self,—you will see her to the last assembling a crowd around her; and to those who wonder at her doing so, she will reply: "I am unfortunate enough not to be able to do without the things I do not care for." It was necessary that every room in that palace of Armida should be filled, no matter how or by whom; a vacuum was the one thing dreaded.

"The desire to be surrounded increases," writes Mme. de Staal (Mlle. de Launay) to Mme. Du Deffand, "and I foresee that if you

have an apartment and do not fill it, there will be great regret for what you lose, no matter what it is. Great people, by dint of expanding themselves, become so thin one can see daylight through them; it is a fine study to contemplate them; I know nothing that brings one more surely back to philosophy."

Thus did Mlle. de Launay, the La Bruyère of Sceaux, observe things; and she crowns her Memoirs by a portrait of the Duchesse du Maine, which ought to be here transcribed at full length, so complete and finished is it, and so well does she sum up an entire species in the person of its most singular individual. It is a piece of the finest and most delicate moral physiology. I give its principal features:

"Mme. la Duchesse du Maine, at sixty years of age, has not yet learned anything from experience; she is a child of much intelligence; she has the defects and the charm of a child. Inquiring and credulous, she has desired to acquire all kinds of knowledge; but is satisfied to get them superficially. The conclusions of those who brought her up are to her principles and rules, about which her mind has never formed the slightest doubt; she submitted herself to them once for all. Her provision of ideas is made; she would reject the best-demonstrated truths, and resist the best arguments, if they conflicted with the first impressions she received. All examination is impossible to her volatility of mind, and doubt is a condition that her weakness cannot endure. Her Catechism and Descartes's Philosophy are two systems that she understands equally well. . . . .

"The idea she has of herself is a conviction she has accepted like all her other opinions. She believes in herself just as she believes in God and in Descartes, without examination or discussion. Her mirror has not been able to raise the slightest doubt in her mind as to the charms of her face; the testimony of her eyes has no weight with her against the judgment of those who decided that she was beautiful and well-formed. Her vanity is of a singular kind; but it seems less shocking because it is unreflecting; though for that very reason it is more absurd.

"Intercourse with her is slavery; her tyranny is undisguised; she

never deigns to colour it with an appearance of friendship. She says, ingenuously, that she 'has the misfortune not to be able to do without persons for whom she cares nothing at all.' And she proves it. She hears with indifference of the death of those who, if they kept her waiting a quarter of an hour for a walk or a game of cards, would make her weep."

This insensibility was proved to the letter upon the death of the Duchesse d'Estrées, which took place suddenly at Anet in 1747. It seemed that Mme. du Maine could not exist without that duchess, who became the manager of all her pleasures, the Malezieu of her last years. She was buried; "then the curtain was lowered, and no one ever spoke of her again." The author of the portrait goes on to show us in this way all the artless vices of her princess, all her good qualities without soul and without ties, her religion without piety, her profusion without generosity, much information and no real knowledge, "all the eagerness of friendship with none of its sentiments," not the slightest suspicion of human sympathy and reciprocity: "there is no such thing as conversation with her; she does not care to be understood; it suffices her to have listeners." Mlle. de Launay concludes by quoting the following saying, which expresses the result of her study, and which the little duchess might well have written of herself:

"'She" (the Duchesse du Maine) "sent word to a person of much intelligence that 'Princes were in the moral world what monsters were in the physical: we see openly in them the vices that are unseen in other men.'"

That conclusion is true of all those who are worshipped and believe themselves born to be worshipped, from Nebuchadnezzar to the Duchesse du Maine. But, while contemplating them with a sort of amazement (for, under this more or less royal form, the species is now disappearing day by day), let us avoid our own reefs and endeavour not to overflow in self-complacency; let us remember that in them there was much of ourselves; that their defects are those that we might have to-morrow if we were not restrained and warned by the resistance of things. In place of these people born demigods, who were the monstrous product of the old *régime,* let us put, in idea, the *parvenus,* who are the habitual product of the new state of things. We know the *parvenu* on the morrow of a revolution, for we have seen him, that being, that *monster* characteristic of modern society. Man may turn and overturn situations, he will not change his defects or his perversities; we see them all reappear; only they reproduce themselves, according to their period, in forms more or less noble, polished, and agreeable; and the form that combined excess of egotism with delicacy of mind and politeness is rather that of the past.

Madame de Staal-Delaunay.

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Madame de Staal-Delaunay.

CERTAINLY the nineteenth is the most retrospective of centuries. We are never weary of searching, stirring, disclosing the past. At the same time that industrial activity and scientific invention are going forward in all directions towards the new and towards the unknown, intellectual activity, which does not find sufficient food in the works or thoughts of the present day, and is often in danger of turning against itself, looks back in search of an object, and finds it among the things of an olden time, whether those of four thousand years ago, or those of yesterday: little we care what period, provided we can occupy and interest ourselves in it, and that our mind and our curiosity can lodge there, if only for the passing moment. To-day, a well-known man of Letters, M. Barrière, is publishing a Collection, made with taste, of the numerous Memoirs of the eighteenth century, from the Regency to the Directory; it is a fortunate idea, which will enable us to see again, in its daily existence, an epoch that has for many persons already passed into the condition of romance.

This, if I count correctly, is the third time since

1800, that fashion and publication have turned to the Memoirs of that period. The first period of such return was that of the rebirth of society, under the Consulate and the first years of the Empire. Then it was that the Vicomte de Ségur published his Memoir of Bezenval; that M. Craufurd published those of Mme. du Hausset; and that the series of little volumes from the publishing house of Léopold Colin made their appearance. The second period was under the Restoration; here historical and political interests had sway. Long series of complete Memoirs of the eighteenth century and of the French Revolution appeared, in which M. Barrière played an important part as editor. To-day, for the third time, under this return of fashion, nothing more than an interest of literary taste is concerned, and in our opinion this indifference is not a very propitious condition for judging rightly, or for correcting old impressions and forming others new and definitive.

Madame de Staal deserved, by good right, to open the series, for it is with her that the style and tone characteristic of the women of the eighteenth century properly begins. An eloquent writer, M. Cousin, in the sketch, so full of ardour, which he made of the women of the seventeenth century, loudly awarded them the preference over the women of the succeeding age. I understand him: the moment we bring forth grandeur, contrast of character, splendour of circumstances, there can be no hesitation. Whom

MADAME DE STAAL-DELAUNAY.

From the painting by Mignard.

can we contrast with women some of whom carried into cloisters loftier souls than those of Corneille's heroines ; while others, after all the vicissitudes and tempests of their human lives, have had the signal honour to be lauded and proclaimed by Bossuet? Nevertheless, as, in the matter of womankind, strength and grandeur are not everything, I cannot, for my part, extend preference to exclusion. Neither the women of the sixteenth century—though they suffered the wrong of being seared by Brautôme—nor those of the eighteenth, although it is the tone of the day to be all the more severe upon them because they are supposed to have been more indulgent, are, in my opinion, to be thus despised. What is it, after all, that is in question, if not grace, intellect, and charm (I speak of the charm that survives and still is felt throughout the ages)? Now the *élite* of women, in all three of those centuries, were abundantly and diversely gifted with those qualities. This diversity reminds me of the charming story of the "Three Manners," each of which, according to the Athenians of Voltaire, was successful in its turn; and had there been a fourth manner of pleasing, who would quarrel with it? I would even go so far as not to exclude from competition the women of the nineteenth century—if the time had come to form a judgment upon them. But let us not question too much for the present half-hour, but keep to Mme. de Staal-Delaunay and my subject.

Inasmuch as, in connection with women, I have used that word "century," I must be still further allowed to insist on certain distinctions that I think necessary, and on classification—a villainous term which I cannot avoid. The women of the sixteenth century, I have elsewhere said, were too much put to one side in the studies that have lately been made of the beginnings of polite society in France. Rœderer sacrificed them to his idol, the hôtel de Rambouillet. We shall return, if I am not mistaken, to those women of the sixteenth century, to those contemporaries of the three Marguerites, who knew so well how to carry on, abreast with public matters, conversation and pleasures. "I have often heard women of the highest rank talk and discuss with ease, with elegance, the gravest matters of morals, of politics, of physics." This was a testimony given to French women by an astonished German, who wrote of his travels in Latin and at a date (1616) when the hôtel de Rambouillet could not as yet have produced its results.

However that may be, the seventeenth century certainly opens with Mme. de Rambouillet, and closes with Mme. de Maintenon. In like manner, the eighteenth begins with the Duchesse du Maine and Mme. de Staal, and ends with Mme. de Staël and Mme. Roland; I give that latter name purposely, for it marks an event—that of solid merit and grace introduced into the middle classes, and thenceforth making an increasing place therein. I know how

true taste and refinement were long the almost exclusive appanage of the aristocratic world; and how, in some respects, and in spite of the changes that have supervened, they are so still. But it is no less evident that the farther we progress, the more true courtesy, distinction of nature and tone are found naturally compatible with a middle-class condition; the name of Mme. Roland signifies all this. After her, women of that station began to possess as of right what was formerly considered an audacious usurpation.

The women of the eighteenth century, usually so-called, the primitive type of whom was transmitted without alteration from the Duchesse du Maine, through the well-known names of Mme. de Staal-Delaunay, Mme. de Lambert, Mme. du Deffand, the Maréchale de Luxembourg, Mme. de Coislin, Mme. de Créquy, down to Mme. de Tessé and the Princesse de Poix, divide themselves, nevertheless, into two distinct groups—those before Jean-Jacques, and those after. All the latter, those after Jean-Jacques, that is to say, those who came under his influence, were kindled into passion for him, had a vein of *sentiment* which their predecessors never sought and never knew. The latter, the women of the eighteenth century before Rousseau (and Mme. de Staal-Delaunay presents a perfect and most faithful image of these), are purely the pupils of La Bruyère. They read him in youth, they verified him by experience. To that

book of La Bruyère which seems to set its seal on their minds, add, if you choose, that they had also read in early years "The Plurality of Worlds" and "The Search for Truth."

Mme. de Staal begins the series of the female writers of the eighteenth century as distinctly as Fontenelle initiated the work of his group. She was born much sooner than has been supposed, or than her biographers have stated. A scholar, to whom we owe many rectifications of this kind, M. Ravenel, has cleared up this point, which is not without importance to an understanding of the life of Mlle. Delaunay. I call her Mlle. Delaunay from habit, for (another correction made by M. Ravenel) she was not so named. Her father's name was Cordier; but, having been obliged to leave the country for some cause not mentioned, he left in France a young and beautiful wife, who resumed her family name, Delaunay, and the daughter, in turn, took the name of her mother, which has remained to her.

The young Cordier-Delaunay was born in Paris in August, 1684, and not in 1693, as was generally believed. She was therefore nine years older than has been supposed; not that she conceals her age, for she nowhere mentions it. She does not give the precise date of her birth in her Memoirs (dates, under a woman's pen are always rather nebulous); but she mentions, in the narrative of her youth, certain historical circumstances which might put us on the right

track. It results from these extra nine years of which we have been unaware, that she was fully twenty-seven years old when she entered the service of the Duchesse du Maine, consequently she was already a woman whose mind was formed, and who might suffer from her position, but would take no moulding other than that of restraint. It follows from this great advance in her age that she was thirty-five years old at the time of her love-affair in the Bastille with the Chevalier de Ménil, and that she did not marry the Baron de Staal until her fifty-first year. Hence, during the course of this existence of which the bloom was so short and so quickly gone, we see how matters came to no result, and we understand better the art of delicate irony in that firm and charming mind, and its tone of enjoyment without gaiety born of constant thwarting.

An oft-quoted saying of Mme. de Staal might give an idea that her Memoirs were not as sincere as they should be. "I have painted only a half-length portrait of myself," she replied one day to a friend who expressed surprise that she should have told everything. The saying was much repeated, and it has done injustice to the veracity of the writer. Mme. de Staal was a person of truth, and her book is a true book in the full acceptation of the word; that characteristic is imprinted on every page. It is true that on certain delicate and reserved points she may not have said all: for instance, it is possible that her love-passages

in the Bastille with the Chevalier de Ménil may have gone a little farther than she admits; all that is very likely, and no one could reasonably ask a woman to be more sincere on such points. The reader, if he has the desire, can go the rest of the way himself without much effort. Lemontey thinks he finds much malice in certain remarks of hers on the Abbé de Chaulieu, when she went to see him on leaving the Bastille and found him quite changed from what he had been previously: "He was already very ill," she says, "from the disease of which he died three weeks later. I saw him, and I noticed how, in that condition, we become *indifferent to all that is useless to us.*" Lemontey thinks he sees in those words a revelation that escaped her—which is being shrewd indeed. Of whatever utility this able woman may have been in past times to the Abbé de Chaulieu, who was almost an octogenarian, it is not upon avowals of this kind that I rest the greater or less degree of sincerity of any woman-author in the Memoirs that she writes. The sincerity I mean is of another order; it exists in the sentiments expressed, in the total of the judgments and the views; in a person's not lauding him or herself directly or indirectly, not claiming too much, not magnifying self, looking at self and others from a just point of view, and daring to show it. And what book succeeds better than the Memoirs of Mme. de Staal in rendering exactly that perfect and often cruel accuracy of observation, that inexorable senti-

ment of reality? It was she who said these lasting words: "Truth is as it can be; it has no merit but that of being what it is." Thus her Memoirs are the contrary of the romances that we dream; like life itself they grow sad and sadder.

A noble spirit, lofty and stoical even in its weaknesses, a firm and free mind, stamp themselves in clear-cut, delicate lines upon those Memoirs. We admire a sureness of ideas and tone that is sometimes rather alarming. There is so little of the superfluous that we are tempted to ask if the necessary is always there. The words *coldness, dryness,* enter our minds; but, on reflection, we come to think that we mean in most cases merely accuracy and decision. Never does her pen grope its way, never does she play with her thought; she catches it and carries it along firmly and promptly. And there is very much strength in this small display of effort. Pliny the Younger, in the eulogies he made on certain writers, was wont to put together in one word, as being closely united, two qualities, namely: *amaritudo, vigour,* born and steeped in a secret *bitterness.* Mlle. Delaunay (we may quote Latin about a woman who so nearly became Mme. Dacier) possessed that vigour. Fréron, giving account of her Memoirs in his *Année Littéraire* (1755), has well remarked that we may apply to her what she said of the Duchesse du Maine: "Her mind never makes use of turns of phrase, or figures, or anything at all that calls itself invention. Vividly impressed by

objects, it renders them as the glass of a mirror reflects, without adding, without omitting, without changing anything." In my opinion, however, the comparison with the reflection of a mirror does not go deep enough for what was in Mlle. Delaunay; objects when she reflects them have the more solid character of an etching. Grimm, in his *Correspondance* (August 15, 1775), in praising the Memoirs, says: "The prose of M. de Voltaire excepted, I know none more agreeable than that of Mme. de Staal." That is true, although that prose, of a clearness so charming and novel, does not resemble that of Voltaire, which alone was truly light and flowing. The simplicity of Mme. de Staal's diction is otherwise contrived. But what am I about? Why should I trouble myself with Grimm and his opinions, when, in the most delicate and delightful literary volumes that French criticism has produced, we possess the judgment and the definition given by M. Villemain of the manner and the delicacies of Mme. de Staal's style?

In all that concerns the person herself, the illustrious critic is severe; he thinks he sees in the satirical sketches of the witty woman what he calls "the *soubrette* bias." Did Mlle. Delaunay deserve this backhanded blow? Was the "indelible character of the waiting-maid," as she bitterly calls it herself, so indelible that it follows her even into the productions of her thought? Nothing could be less founded, it seems to me, than such a judgment, nothing more unjust.

We have seen that she was already advanced into womanhood when she entered the service of the Duchesse du Maine; she was no longer a young girl easy to remould. Her early education had been solid, choice, brilliant; the convent of Saint-Louis at Rouen, where she passed her youthful years, was "like a little State where she reigned as sovereign." She, too, had her little Court of Sceaux in that convent where M. Brunel, M. de Rey, and the Abbé de Vertot were at her feet, and where those good ladies, de Grieu, had eyes but for her. "What they did for me," she says, "cost me so little that it seemed to me only in the natural order of things. It is only our efforts to obtain things that teach us their value. In short, I acquired, though I was so little, the defects of great people; which has served me since then to excuse them."

Thus brought up, and thus treated, till she was twenty-six years of age, on the footing of a perfect and admirable being, when, later, she fell into servitude, she was like a dethroned little queen, and she kept those feelings: "convinced," she says, "that it is our own actions only that can degrade us." No act of her life contradicted that noble sentiment. The injury to her of this early education and exclusive training was rather, as she very truthfully points out, to give her a somewhat learned tone, a liking to teach, to pattern others by herself, which was natural in a young woman who had read the *History of the Academy of Sciences,* and had studied geometry.

And here we must observe, that in the majority of the passages quoted in proof of this defect, it is she herself who denounces it, and gaily does the honours of her person. More than one reader has failed to detect the smile lurking behind the words.

The beginning of the Memoirs is full of grace and has something of the novel in it; it is thus that life appeared to her "before the charm ceased," before illusion vanished. The stay at the Château de Silly with a friend of her childhood, the arrival of the young marquis, his natural indifference, the scene behind the hornbeam hedge between the two young girls, which he hears without being seen, his curiosity awakened far more than his desire, her emotion in thinking herself the object of his affection, her self-control, nevertheless, the *tête-à-tête* walk in which astronomy is so useful, and the young soul tastes the austere sweetness of mastering itself—all this composes a romance, very simple and touching; it is one of those memories of which there is but one in a lifetime, a memory in which the wearied heart can always rest and be refreshed. These may be nothings, but how true they are! how they cling to secret fibres—to those of every one! "The feeling that engraved these little facts upon my memory," says the author, "has remained a distinct recollection." Even in depicting them, see how her sobriety appears! She permits herself only a discreet sketch, a delight-

ful but restrained touch, the faithful expression of feelings too repressed.

Nevertheless, M. de Silly is the man she most truly loved. With what passionate vivacity she describes his first departure! "Mlle. de Silly burst into tears when he bade us adieu. I hid mine from his eyes that were more inquisitive than tender; but after he had disappeared, I thought I should have ceased to live. My eyes that were wont to see him could see nothing more. I did not deign to speak, for he could not hear me; *I even felt that I thought no longer.*" Observe that last touch; it reminds me of Lamartine's line addressed to Nature:

"A single being lacks thee, and thou art depopulated."

But in Mlle. Delaunay the gradation ends with *thought.* This absence of thought is, in truth, the most violent symptom to the mind of a philosopher, to whoever has begun by saying: "I think, therefore I am." What she adds is no less noticeable: "His fixed image filled my soul. I felt, nevertheless, that every moment took him farther from me, and my grief grew in the same proportion as the distance that parted us." Here we come upon her defect; the grief that grew in direct proportion to the distance is more than philosophy, it is geometry; and we can understand why M. de Silly should write to his young friend, in a letter which she transcribes: "Use, I beg of you, the simplest expressions; above

all, make no use of those that belong to the Sciences." As a man of the world, and full of tact, he had laid his finger at once on the slight defect.

This, however, was an early inclination, soon repressed, which scarcely affected an exquisite diction and the best of language. When the marquis returned shortly after to Silly, the flower of sentiment in her heart was already slightly wilted; reflection had spoken. These few moments of enchantment were, therefore, a very short springtime in the life of Mlle. Delaunay; but their perfume was lasting enough to fill her soul during the most exposed years of her youth, and to preserve her at that time from all other risks. She was twenty-three or twenty-four years of age when she first met M. de Silly, and he was thirty-six or thirty-seven. His cold, ambitious character seemed more marked as he grew older; Grimm declares that he was a pedant and not amiable; he tells us that disappointed ambition finally so disturbed his mind that he flung himself from a window and was killed. Mme. de Staal glides over that frightful detail. She found him agreeable in his last years, and, in spite of the errors of the intervening ones, she never ceased to remain under subjection to his old prestige. She even carried her friendship, during a violent attack of passion which convulsed him, so far as to assist him in the character of *doctor-moralist:* I can find no other terms so appropriate; the letters that she wrote him at this period are those of a confessor and a

physician combined. They show consummate experience, lofty wisdom, and are charming still, even under the supreme disillusion. Like all true doctors, she better knows the veritable condition of the patient than the means of curing it; she can offer only palliatives, and she herself directs him to ambition!

"I had hoped much," she writes to him, "from time and absence; but it seems they have produced nothing; on the contrary, the evil has grown worse. The sole resource that I can imagine would be an occupation, strong and satisfying from the dignity of its object; love has no such expedient. I wish that ambition could give it to you. You are not made to live without passions; frivolous amusements cannot nourish a heart as voracious as yours. Try to find an object more vast than its capacity, otherwise you will for ever feel the loathing that all that is mediocre inspires." M. de Silly died November 19, 1727; he was lieutenant-general of the armies of the king.

If M. de Silly is the hero of the first part of the Memoirs, the hero of the second part is undoubtedly M. de Maisonrouge, lieutenant of the king at the Bastille, that perfect model of a passionate and delicate lover. It is well that Mme. de Staal, who so cruelly sacrificed him to the sulky Chevalier de Ménil, should avenge him upon herself, by the interest she sheds upon him, and by the affectionate colouring with which she surrounds him. Alas! at the moment

when she most appreciates the devotion and merits of the poor Maisonrouge, it is the other whom she regrets! With a soul so firm, a mind so superior, yet the miserable plaything of an unworthy passion, she flees from him who seeks her, and seeks the man who flees her, according to the eternal cross-purposes of the heart. Oh! how truly it gave her the right to say —as she did later, when the storm had passed, in a letter to M. de Silly—"With due deference to Mme. de . . ., who treats love so methodically, every one in love is for himself, and makes it as he pleases. I am surprised that so venerable a person does not see that passions are aberrations of mind which are not susceptible of the order she wants to put into them. I think precepts on this matter ridiculous; fixed rules might as well be made for the manner in which crazy people should rave."

I said of Mme. de Staal that she was like a first pupil of La Bruyère, but a pupil who became the equal of the master. No writer could furnish as many new, true, irrefutable thoughts to add to the chapter on "Women" as she; besides which, she spent thirty years of her life in practising and commenting on the chapter on "Grandees." She observed the latter at her ease, but also to her cost, in that little Court of Sceaux, exactly as we watch big fishes in a little pond. "The Great," she wrote to Mme. du Deffand, "by dint of stretching themselves out become so thin that you can see through them: it is a

fine study to contemplate them. I know nothing that leads sooner to philosophy."

The scenes with the Duchesse de la Ferté and the adventures at Versailles are excellent comedy, and in the best of taste, frank and simple; they are well on a par as to pleasantry with the Grammont Memoirs. The first scenes as waiting-maid to the Duchesse du Maine are also very amusing. In the art of relating amusingly, Mme. de Staal is a *classic,* and if she could judge of herself to-day, she would not find much reason to complain of fate. She was not loved by those who she desired should love her ; her youth was not all that could be wished, and she suffered; but years brought her the satisfactions of thought, the reflecting enjoyments of observation; she saw true ; and it was given her to render what she saw. If she missed more than one gift of fate, she at least had those of mind, language, and taste. Some of her least sayings have come into the circulation of society, and have added to the riches of the mind of France. More than that: by her noble conduct during a miserable conspiracy, she has won a place in all future history. How many statesmen, who think themselves great men, and who are striving all their lives, do not obtain as much!

This tardy satisfaction, this posthumous triumph, were bought very dear, no doubt. The correspondence of Mme. de Staal with Mme. du Deffand reveals the petty miseries at the bottom under an

always agreeable surface; we can follow her habit of mind and ironical gaiety persisting ever throughout an existence without pleasure and burdened with ennui. The satirical scenes in which Mme. du Châtelet and Voltaire appear present a brilliant variety by the way. This correspondence is the true conclusion of the Memoirs. Whatever may be said by Fréron, Mme. de Staal did well not to prolong them, and not to enlarge upon the closing years. There is a degree of experience, of knowledge of the depths, past which there is no longer interest in anything, not even in recollection; we hasten when we reach that period to bar the window and close the curtains for ever. What is there to tell the world henceforth, after we have said to ourselves: "How can we really care for anything when we look at it closely? We owe our tastes to our mistakes. If we always saw things as they are, far from getting impassioned over them, we should scarcely make use of them at all." That is how Mme. de Staal, in her latter years, wrote to intimate friends; and on her best days she added: "My health is pretty good, my life easy, and, if it were not for ennui, I should be well enough. That ennui consists in seeing nothing that pleases me, and doing nothing that amuses me; but when the body does not suffer, and the mind is tranquil, we ought to think ourselves happy."

One day, after leaving the Bastille, and before becoming entirely resigned to the yoke, Mlle. Delaunay

resolved to return and live in her little convent of Saint-Louis, at Rouen, where she had passed her only years of happiness. She made the journey, but returned in haste. The women of the seventeenth century gladly took refuge in convents from the storms of the world, and died there; not so the women of the eighteenth: they could no longer bear that sort of life.

After the letters to Mme. du Deffand, those of Mme. de Staal to M. d'Héricourt, less studded with wit, give a sadder and perhaps truer idea of her manner of existence towards the last. Her health diminished, her sight failed, and though she lived on, she was in the way of becoming totally blind like her friend, Mme. du Deffand. Meanwhile, the subjection, the annoyances of her life with a princess whose caprices were not more attractive as she grew older, rendered intolerable a tie which there was no possibility of breaking; the chain must be dragged to the end. "I see the misery," she said, "but I no longer feel it." That is her last pillow. But a terrible speech escapes her at a return of the springtime: "As for me, I no longer care for it [the spring]; I am so weary of seeing flowers and of hearing them talked about that I await frost and snow with impatience." After such an utterance there is nothing further to say.

She was sixty-six years old when she died, June 15, 1750. The Duchesse du Maine was scarcely dead, three years later, before it was arranged to publish the

Memoirs; they appeared in 1755; even the death of the Baron de Staal was not awaited. In those days little consideration was shown when it was a question of securing pleasures of the mind. The book obtained at once an immense success. Fontenelle, however, who was still living, was much surprised on reading it: "I am sorry for her," he said; "I did not suspect her of such pettiness. It is written with agreeable elegance, but it was not worth the trouble of being written at all." Trublet replied that all the women were of that opinion, but that all the men were not. Trublet was right; Fontenelle was mistaken. He was too near to the things that he thought petty to judge them fairly.

These Memoirs are, in fact, a faithful picture of life. We may, none of us, have been trained in a convent: none of us, certainly, have lived the life of the little Court of Sceaux; but whoso has felt the keen impressions of youth, and has seen, almost immediately, that first charm lose its bloom, and its freshness fade under the breath of experience, and life become arid, and at the same time turbulent and passionate, until aridity is nothing else than ennui—that person, I say, reading these Memoirs will see himself and say, at every page: "It is true." It is the special quality of truth to live; above all, when it is clothed in clear and definite language. Huet, Bishop of Avranches, tells us that he was accustomed, every spring, to re-read Theocritus under the budding leaf-

age of the woods, at the edge of a brook, and to the song of nightingales. It seems to me that the Memoirs of Mme. de Staal should be re-read at the beginning of each winter, at the end of autumn, beneath the November trees, to the sound of the falling foliage.

Le Sage

(Alain-René).

Le Sage.

GIL BLAS, in spite of its Spanish costume and all the imitations that are said to be in it, is one of the most truly French books that we have. It matters very little to the quality of the work that the author took his canvas here or there, that he inserted such or such borrowed episode; the merit of the book is not in its general invention, but in the marshalling and management of each scene and each group, in the detail of the talk and the narrative, in the easy air and the sportive gaiety that unite the whole. In prose and under the form of a novel, it has a merit and an originality of the same kind as those of La Fontaine. The touch of Le Sage is wholly French; and if our literature possesses a book that is good to re-read, after an invasion, after each convulsion in the moral or the political order, or in the domain of taste, to calm the temper, restore the mind to its point of view, and refresh the language, it is *Gil Blas*.

Le Sage was born, trained, and began to be known in the reign of Louis XIV. Twenty-four years younger than La Bruyère, seventeen younger than

Fénelon, and six years older than Saint-Simon, he belongs to a generation of writers who were born to honour the succeeding era, but whose opening careers brightened the decline of the great reign. His most careful biographers date his birth in 1668, on the peninsula of Rhuys, in Lower Brittany, where Abélard was abbé. From the depth of that energetic and rugged province, whence great writers, innovators more or less revolutionary, have come to us—Lamennais, Broussais, a later René, and others—Alain-René Le Sage arrived, mature, shrewd, gay, cured of much in advance, and possessing the least obstinate of minds. We shall find nothing of the Breton in him but his pride of soul and his independence of character.

But how, and through what trials, what obstacles, came he so early to his knowledge of life, to that complete and perfect maturity to which Nature destined him? We know but few of the events of his life. He received his schooling at the college of Vannes, where he had, it is said, an excellent master. He lost his mother at nine years of age, and his father at fourteen; this father was a notary and clerk, like Boileau's father. He had for guardian a negligent uncle. Coming to Paris at twenty-two years of age to take his course of philosophy and law, he led the life of a young man, and had, no doubt, some of those bachelor adventures which he related and diversified later. Every one agrees in saying that he had an

ALAIN RENÉ LE SAGE.

From the engraving by Leloir.

agreeable countenance, an imposing figure, and had been a very handsome man in his youth. There was talk of an early gallant intimacy with a woman of rank. In any case, this life of mere worldliness was short, for we find him, at twenty-six years of age, marrying the daughter of a Parisian *bourgeois,* who was herself only twenty-two. From this time forth he led a domestic life, and one of labour and restraint. It was from the rue du Cœur-Volant, faubourg Saint-Germain, later from the rue Montmartre, or from other obscure homes where he lived, that those charming writings, which seem the mirror of the world, came forth.

Yet it appears that immediately after his marriage he tried to support himself by regular employment, and that he was for a while in provincial finance, as clerk to some farmer-general. He stayed but a short time, and brought back a horror of and contempt for such contractors, whom he afterwards stigmatised on every occasion. The habitual character of Le Sage's satire is gay, light-hearted, and pungent without bitterness; but whenever any question of contractors, of Turcarets, comes up, he sharpens his blade and drives it in without pity, as if he had reprisals to make. I notice the same thing in whatever concerns actors, of whom he had had to complain. These are the only two classes whom the amiable satirist attacks vivaciously, and almost savagely—he whose satire is, in general, tempered by good-humour and kindliness.

On becoming a man of Letters, Le Sage met with a protector and useful counsellor in the Abbé de Lyonne, one of the sons of that able minister of State under Louis XIV, Hughes de Lyonne. The abbé knew the Spanish language and literature at a period when they were ceasing to be known in France; and he drew from them as from a mine, still rich, which was beginning to be forgotten. Let us here form a just idea of Le Sage, exaggerating nothing in order to better appreciate his charming genius. Le Sage proceeded much as do the authors of the present time, and of nearly all times. He wrote day by day, volume after volume; taking his subjects where he could and whenever they offered themselves fittingly. He worked his *trade*. But he did it naturally, with facility, with a gift for narrative and a dramatic sense (his essential talent), with a vein of satire and comedy running through it all, and with a lively, gay, and easy morality, which was his personal manner of feeling and thinking. After a few rather unfortunate attempts at translation and imitation, he gained his first two successes in the year 1707, with the pretty comedy of *Crispin, le rival de son maître,* and *Le Diable boiteux*.

Le Diable boiteux, so far as title, framework, and personages go, is taken from the Spanish, but Le Sage brought the whole into the Parisian point of view; he knew our measure; he handled his original as he pleased, easily, appropriately; he scattered allusions

throughout to suit French taste; he fused what he borrowed and what he added into a most amusing picture of manners and morals, which seemed both new and easy, unexpected but recognisable. This book is one that Le Sage remade and made over again in a hundred ways in after years, under one form or another; it is a picture of the whole of human life, a lively review of all conditions, with the intrigues, the vices, and the absurdities, that characterise every one. We should picture to ourselves, the state of men's mind at the time *Le Diable boiteux* appeared—that gloomy, wearied, calamitous old age of Louis XIV, burdened with enforced reverence and devotion which weighed so heavily upon every one, and with that decorum which had now become a torment and a constraint. Suddenly, Asmodeus came and perched with his pupil on the roof of a tower, let us say it was a tower of Notre-Dame; thence, by a turn of his hand, he lifted all the roofs of the city, and men saw all hypocrisies, all shams laid bare, in short, the secret side of humanity. The panorama lay there in broad daylight. Asmodeus had a wild success; they did not give him time to clothe himself, said the critics of that day; people came post-haste to get the pamphlet. Two editions were issued in one year: "They are working at a third," announced the *Journal de Verdun* (December, 1707); "two seigneurs of the Court fought, sword in hand, in Barbin's shop, to get the last copy of the second edition."

Boileau, one day when Jean-Baptiste Rousseau was with him, detected *Le Diable boiteux* in the hands of his little lacquey, and threatened to dismiss him if the book remained in the house. There is a success indeed! consecrated and enlivened by the wrath of Boileau.

For a little lacquey the book may not be very moral; certainly it does not preach the morality of the Catechism; it is that of practical life, namely: to be the dupe of nothing and of no one. We may say of *Le Diable boiteux* as was said, so wisely, of *Gil Blas:* "This book is moral like experience." Dating from this first work, Le Sage's character is clearly exhibited; he is La Bruyère on the stage and in action, without a trace of effort. *Le Diable boiteux* is a good predecessor to the *Lettres Persanes,* but it precedes them with a light step, without the slightest pretention to laboured wit, and without fatigue. There is not the shadow of mannerism about Le Sage; his shafts are lively, pungent words that escape him as he flies along. Thus Asmodeus, speaking of a brother-demon with whom he had quarrelled, remarks: "We embraced, and since then we are mortal enemies."

Nothing could be gayer or more amusing than the little comedy of *Crispin, le rival de son maître.* One of the first scenes between the two valets, Crispin and La Branche, offers an example of that light-hearted volatility in the comic, which is the peculiar character of Le Sage, whether in his plays or in his novels.

The two valets, meeting again, tell each other their adventures: both had been utter rascals in earlier days, but they think they have cured themselves of that rascality by again taking service. La Branche, especially, flatters himself that he is in the right way; he serves a young man named Damis: "He is an amiable fellow," says La Branche, "he likes play, wine, and women; he is a man for everything. We keep up all sorts of debauchery together. It amuses me; and prevents me from doing wrong." "What an innocent life!" remarks Crispin. For my part, I say, what excellent and guileless comedy that shows us vice so artlessly! This play of *Crispin* begins the attack on financiers: we see *Turcaret* looming up in the distance. Crispin tells himself that he is tired of being a valet: "Ah! Crispin," he says, "it is your own fault! You have always gone after trifles—you ought to have shone in finance. . . . With my wit and cleverness, *morbleu!* I ought already to have gone more than once into bankruptcy." And the last touch of all seems like a transition to the coming comedy, when Oronte says to the two valets: "You have intelligence, but you ought to make better use of it, and, to make you honest men, I will put you both into business."

Le Sage had the luck of opportuneness; he divined and slightly preceded the moment when, at the death of Louis XIV, the orgy of financiers and *parvenus* began. *Turcaret* was played in 1709; the absurdities

and turpitudes that displayed themselves on the triumph of Law's system are scathed in advance in that play. The comedy denounces and precedes the explosion of vice and absurdity; it might then have been preventive, if warnings ever can be. *Turcaret* is both a comedy of character and a page in the history of morals, like *Tartuffe*. Molière wrote *Tartuffe* several years before the real Tartuffe triumphed under Louis XIV. Le Sage wrote *Turcaret* several years before Turcaret was on a pinnacle during the Regency. But, like many other vices of the Regency, the real Turcaret came from beneath the surface of the last years of Louis XIV. All sorts of difficulties were raised against the representation; it required the king's son to remove them. *Turcaret* was played "by order of Monseigneur," to whom we ought to be grateful for this mark of favour to literature, the only one he ever gave.

Great as was the need of protectors against the cabal of offended financiers and jealous authors, Le Sage held firm, and did not permit himself to give way to any base compliance. Here the Breton in his nature asserts itself. Before the play was acted he had promised the Duchesse de Bouillon to go and read it to her. She expected that the reading would take place before dinner; certain matters detained Le Sage, and he was late in arriving. When he appeared, the duchess told him stiffly that he had made her lose more than an hour waiting for him. "Very well,

madame," he answered, coldly, "I will let you gain two." And, making his bow, he departed. Collé, who relates the anecdote, knew it on good authority, and applauds it like a man who was of a somewhat similar nature.

Aside from this comedy, which was of the nature of a pitched battle in which Le Sage, spurring to the charge, resolved to make vice hateful, satire in him and in all his other writings keeps its amiable as well as amusing character; and it is this combination that makes the charm and originality of his writings. Such, above all, is the character of his novel *Gil Blas,* that delightful and varied masterpiece, with which his name is for ever associated.

Gil Blas was published, successively, in four volumes, the last two of which followed the first after rather long intervals. The first two appeared in 1715, the year of the death of Louis XIV. A freshness of youth, a freedom of movement were in them that suited well with the beginnings of an emancipated epoch. What can I say of *Gil Blas* that has not already been said, already been felt and expressed by many clever panegyrists, many delicate and acute critics, and that all judicious readers have not thought for themselves? I must content myself by humbly saying and repeating it all once more.

The author, in this lengthy, developed, and easy narrative, intended to depict human life as it is; with its varieties and its adventures, with the whimsicalities

that the play of fate and fortune produce, and, above all, with those introduced by the varieties of our tempers, our tastes, and our defects. Gil Blas is a man of very humble and common birth, of the lowest *bourgeoisie;* he early shows himself a wide-awake, clever, and good-natured lad; he has some education, such as it is, and he leaves his home at seventeen years of age to make his way in the world. He passes, in turn, through all conditions, even the lowest and most vulgar; he is not much displeased with any of them, although he is always seeking to push on and to advance himself. Gil Blas at bottom is frank and fairly honest, credulous, vain, and easily taken in. Deceived at first in all ways—by a parasite whom he happens to meet who praises him, by a valet who plays the saint, and by women—he is the dupe of his bad and sometimes of his good qualities. He gets his schooling in all directions, and we make our apprenticeship with him. Excellent subject for practical morals, it may be said of Gil Blas that he *lets himself be made* by things; he never goes ahead of experience; he receives it. He is not a man of genius, of great talent; nor is he anything very extraordinary: his mind is healthy and shrewd, facile and active, essentially teachable, having all sorts of aptitudes in it. The only question is to apply them properly; and that he ends by doing; he makes himself capable of everything, and he deserves the praise given him by his friend Fabrice: "You have the

universal tool." But he does not deserve it until near the end, and that encourages us; we feel, in reading him, that we, also, without too much effort or presumption, can succeed some day as well as he.

All forms of life and of human nature will be found in *Gil Blas* — all, except a certain ideal and moral elevation, which is rare, no doubt, and often simulated, but which is found too real in some instances to allow it to be wholly omitted in a complete picture of humanity. Le Sage, worthy man in other ways, had not that ideal within himself. He was of the opinion that "the most perfect productions of the mind are those in which there are but slight defects, just as the most honourable men are those who have fewest vices." There is nothing more true than that remark, and in *Gil Blas,* the author has amply made use of that method of looking at things that bestows some small vices on the best of men. Gil Blas himself, though he has no very clearly defined innate vice, is very capable of acquiring nearly all kinds at the first encounter. He is, as I have said, an honest man in himself, generally preferring good to evil, but readily letting himself go when occasion, vanity, or self-interest tempts him, and not blushing too much for his conduct, even when it is past. I know the allowance to be made in such a case for the gaiety of the novel, for the habits of the class, and also for the easy morality of a period when people pardoned the rascalities of the Chevalier Des Grieux, and laughed

at those of the Chevalier de Grammont. Nevertheless, we cannot conceal from ourselves that it is doubtless in order to keep him on the level of human nature that Gil Blas has not a loftier soul: he is kind to all, moderately scrupulous according to circumstances, valet before he was master, and more or less of the race of the Figaros.

Le Sage had thoroughly observed one fact, which other moralists have also noticed, namely: the qualities that are, perhaps, most characteristic of men taken in the mass, and most fitted to astonish those who think they know them best, are not their wickedness and their folly (into which they only fall by fits and starts): the qualities that are most amazing in men, and most inexhaustible, are their baseness and their dulness. The author of *Gil Blas* knew this well: his personage, in order to remain a natural and medium type, could not, in any degree, be raised to the plane of a stoic or a hero. He represents nothing that is peculiar, or unique, or even rare. Gil Blas is you, is I, is every one. To this conformity of nature with us, to his happy frankness, to his ingenuous sallies and confessions, he owes the fact that he remains, in spite of his vices, ever interesting and amiable in the eyes of the reader. As to respect, as some one has wittily said, that is the last thing he asks of us.

The names of Panurge and Figaro are often mentioned in connection with that of Gil Blas. But

Panurge, that most subtle and sagacious creation of the genius of Rabelais, is peculiar in quite a different way from Gil Blas; he is an original of another quality, gifted with a fantasticality of his own, a vein both poetic and grotesque. In representing certain sides of human nature Panurge exaggerates and caricatures them intentionally in a laughable manner. Figaro, who is more of the lineage of Gil Blas, also has a warmth, a natural gaiety, a *brio* which has something of the lyric in it. Gil Blas is more even, more in the habitual tone of us all. He is we, ourselves, I say again, passing through all those diverse conditions and periods.

The most competent judge of such matters, Walter Scott, said of *Gil Blas:* "This work leaves the reader content with himself and with mankind." Certainly, that is a result which might seem difficult to obtain by a satirist who makes no pretence of embellishing humanity; but neither does he seek to calumniate nor disfigure it; he contents himself with showing it such as it is; and always with a natural air and a diverting tone. Irony, with Le Sage, has no acrimony, as it has with Voltaire. If it has not the air of the great world, and the supreme distinction which is Hamilton's sign-manual, neither has it the affected refinements of causticity and barren feeling. It is an irony that bears witness to a healthy soul, an irony which remains, if one may say so, *good-natured.* It speeds along, finds and flings its

mischievous shaft, and still flies on, not pressing it in. I insist on this absence of bitterness, which constitutes the originality of Le Sage and his distinction as a satirist; that is why he consoles even while ridiculing. In this characteristic, above all, he is different from Voltaire, who laughs and bites in bitter fashion. Remember *Candide*. Pangloss may be a cousin, but he is not the brother of Gil Blas.

It is very noticeable how works that please and succeed the best in styles not classified are sometimes slow in obtaining a just estimation; I mean the estimation that is written and published in serious works. Le Sage's reputation with the public was made and established a quarter of a century ago, while the praise to which he was entitled, and which filled every mouth, was still dealt out to him with a sort of parsimony by the principal authors of the period. It seemed that in their dignity they chose to look twice before saying all the good that they really thought of the best of our novels. The Abbé des Fontaines, it is true, as a good journalist, praised Le Sage for "so many ingenious tales." Voltaire, in the list of writers which he gives in his *Siècle de Louis XIV*, confines himself, under the head of "Le Sage" to a few lines; as follows:

"Le Sage, born at Vannes, in Lower Brittany in 1668. His novel of *Gil Blas* still lives because there is nature in it; it is taken entirely from a Spanish novel, entitled: *La vida del escudero don Marcos de Obrego.* Died in 1747."

Voltaire's assertion is incorrect, and his eulogy reduced to a minimum. We could scarcely understand this severity and malevolence, if we had not read the chapter in which Gil Blas, during his stay at Valence, sees acted a new tragedy by the "fashionable poet," Don Gabriel Triaquero. This incident, wholly satirical, is pointed at Voltaire, who is evidently Don Gabriel. Le Sage was a classic of the preceding century, and not favourable to innovations; probably he had met the young author of "Œdipus" in the first intoxication of success, and being, himself, the most simple of men of intellect, he may have thought him rather a coxcomb and not enough of a good fellow. Voltaire, in turn, finding Le Sage on his path, took his revenge for the satire by faint praise and a false assertion. By those who surrounded Voltaire little praise could be given to Le Sage. Marmontel, in his "Essay on Novels," speaks of him with a sort of regret, and incidentally, as it were; the passage is remarkable for its insufficiency:—

"The satirical novel such as I conceive it," he says, "requires sometimes the pen of Lucian, La Bruyère, or Hamilton, sometimes that of Juvenal, I dare not say that of Molière: that of Le Sage might have sufficed with a more learned study of manners and customs, and a more familiar and intimate knowledge of a certain class of society which the author of *Gil Blas* had not sufficiently observed, and only saw from a distance."

We may here remark the implied reproach to Le Sage of not seeing good company. To us, at this

distance, that reproach disappears. Gil Blas to our eyes is not a man of society, he is *man himself.*

La Harpe, a good critic when he speaks of what he knows and does not let himself be confused by passion, is the first writer who adequately appreciated *Gil Blas.* The page he devotes to him is worthy of Le Sage himself for its ease and lightness of touch:—

"*Gil Blas,*" he says, "is a masterpiece; it belongs to the small number of volumes that we re-read with pleasure; it is a moral and living picture of human life; all conditions are brought into it to give or receive a lesson. But the instruction is never without charm. *Utile dulci* should be the motto of this excellent book, which is seasoned throughout with good jesting. Many of its witticisms have passed into proverbs. . . . We know the personages of *Gil Blas;* we have lived with them; we meet them at every moment. Why? Because in the picture made of them there is not a line drawn without intention and without effect. Le Sage had much intellect, but he devotes so much talent to concealing it, he likes so much to hide behind his characters, he is so little concerned about himself, that we must have good eyes to see the author in his work and duly appreciate them both."

Justice at last was done to Le Sage. After this, critics were not even content merely to say of him with the Abbé de Voisenon and with the public: "He wrote *Gil Blas,* a novel which, for lightness and purity of style and the shrewdness of its moral, will for ever remain a precious monument in French literature." They began to explain why *Gil Blas* was a monument and a masterpiece. All tastes, of course, did not agree. They never do. Enthusiasts by nature, like Diderot, grew heated over Clarissa; the idealists

and the passionate lovers clung to the novels of Jean-Jacques and Mme. de Staël. The French Academy, however, which owed reparation to Le Sage for not having had the honour to possess him, proposed his Eulogy, and divided its prize, in 1822, between two discourses upon him, remarkable in different ways, one by M. Patin and the other by M. Malitourne. I cite part of the first and, as I think, the more solid. In it, *Gil Blas* is admirably characterised; criticism has advanced a step since the days of La Harpe; it has reached the point of delicate detail of analysis and literary anatomy.

"*Le Diable boiteux* was succeeded by *Gil Blas* which is much superior. Between the two works there is almost as great a distance as that which separates the paintings of moralists from those of romance writers. The subject is the same in both, but it is differently presented; in one, observation takes the form of lively and witty expression; in the other it is wholly dramatic: the first gives us a gallery of portraits; the second, a stage and the actors thereon. It is in the latter, above all, that Le Sage shows his power of animating his figures, and of giving them the appearance of life. . . . I do not know if Le Sage himself was tricked by his art; but is there a single one of his readers who has not, at some time, taken for reality the picture that he made for us in *Gil Blas?* His personages were known to us before he showed them to us; since then, we have met them often in the world. We are tempted to say to him what a comic poet said to a critic of antiquity: 'O life, and thou, Menander, which of you two imitated the other?' . . . Such is the history of *Gil Blas:* is it not our own, and that of the majority? Is it not life itself, such as fate and human passions, in spite of reason, have made it?"

But the judgment of authority, that which ought to count the most and will last, is that of Sir Walter Scott,

the reviver of *genre*. That lovable genius, so frank, so benevolent, so free from envy, having to speak of Le Sage in his "Biographical Memoirs of Eminent Novelists," does so with a fulness of heart, a sympathetic intelligence such as one might expect from his fraternal soul:

"Few have ever read this charming book," he says of *Gil Blas*, "without remembering, as one of the most delightful occupations of their life, the time which they first employed in the perusal; and there are few also who do not occasionally turn back to its pages with all the vivacity which attends the recollection of early love. It signifies nothing at what time we have first encountered the fascination, whether in boyhood, when we were chiefly captivated by the cavern of the robbers, and other scenes of romance; whether in more advanced youth, but while our ignorance of the world yet concealed from us the subtle and poignant satire which lurks in so many passages of the work; whether we were learned enough to apprehend the various allusions to history and public matters with which it abounds, or ignorant enough to rest contented with the more direct course of the narration. The power of the enchanter over us is alike absolute, under all these circumstances. . . .

The whole concoction of *Gil Blas* appears to me as original, in that which constitutes the essence of a composition, as it is inexpressibly delightful. . . . It is a work which renders the reader pleased with himself and with mankind, where faults are placed before him in the light of follies rather than vices, and where misfortunes are so interwoven with the ludicrous, that we laugh in the very act of sympathising with them. All is rendered diverting—both the crimes and the retribution which follows them. . . . In short, so strictly are the pages of *Gil Blas* confined to what is amusing that they might perhaps have been improved by some touches of a more masculine, stronger, and firmer line of morality."

The master has spoken. The judgment is given with length and fulness. The regret at the end for the absence of a sterner morality seems to me a slight

concession made by Sir Walter Scott to the English public and to Anglican prejudice. Gil Blas could not have introduced a sterner and more virile morality without ceasing to be himself.

M. Villemain, in his *Tableau du XVIIIe Siècle,* speaks of Le Sage as he well knows how, and places him in the centre of the circle of writers of his literary day and stripe. This clever chapter is more a compilation of all that has been said upon Le Sage and *Gil Blas* than a new testimony delivered by the elegant critic. It is difficult to extract a complete judgment from this series of charming and fleeting meanderings. Dwelling a moment on the accusation of plagiarism brought against Le Sage, M. Villemain, after refuting it in his way, adds:

"It is not that in this affair we pretend to deny altogether the debt to Spain; but that debt is something other than has been said. Our *Gil Blas* was not stolen, no matter what Pere Isla may say, and, quite recently, Dr. Llorente. There was no mysterious manuscript found by Le Sage and concealed from others. But there is no doubt that Le Sage skilfully adopted the clever pleasantry, the grave and gentle philosophy, malicious yet merry, which shines in Cervantes and Cuevedo, and of which many charming examples will always be found in the Spanish moralists and narrators. To this general and free imitation, Le Sage adds the taste of the best antiquity; he is, as to style, the pupil of Terence and Horace."

Le Sage borrowed many other things besides the wit and the philosophy of the Spanish authors; he had no scruple in making use of their ideas, stories, fragments, in fact, of anything that suited him, as Mr. Ticknor, the American historian of Spanish literature,

peremptorily demonstrates. There is no author who has had less scruple in this respect, or who has acted with less ceremony than Le Sage. He justifies the witty definition given one day by M. de Maurepas: — "An author who takes out of books what passes through his head." All this detracts nothing from the merits of Le Sage; but we must, above all, tell the truth and speak frankly on this subject without national and patriotic commonplaces. Let us not be more proud for him than he was for himself. Gil Blas's sense of honour was not high.

Scenes of comedy are so numerous in *Gil Blas* that they leave the reader but little time to perceive what there is that is common and wearisome in certain episodes, certain sentimental tales that the author inserted, here and there, to swell his volumes, and which he gathered from heaven knows where. The first two volumes of the work, after presenting to us all sorts of classes and conditions of men, thieves, canons, doctors, authors, and actors, bring Gil Blas to be intendant, that is, steward of Don Alfonso, and deputed to make a restitution in his name. "This was beginning the business of intendant where it ought to end." The third volume, published in 1724, which is the most remarkable of all, shows us Gil Blas, mounting by degrees from stage to stage; and in proportion to his rise the lessons may seem to be sharper and bolder. But, even in their boldness, they still keep a sort of innocence. Le Sage, even when he jeers, is

never aggressive; he has no thought of making anything triumph. He laughs to laugh, to show nature bare; he never scoffs at the present for the sake of an idea, nor for the profit of some future system. He knows that humanity, in changing its state, will merely change the form of its folly. Here he is wholly out of touch with the eighteenth century, belonging rather to the good old jesters of former times.

This third volume abounds in excellent tales. Gil Blas, become secretary and favourite of the Archbishop of Granada, loses his place in the end through telling the truth. All these scenes at the archbishop's palace are admirably natural, and breathe a spirit of gentle comedy insensibly mingled with all the actions of life. The self-love of authorship is painted in the good old man in full relief, and in all its beatific *naïveté,* yet with a remnant of meekness. The scenes with the actress Laure, that follow immediately, are incomparably true. Le Sage knew to its depths the comic type.

When he goes to Court, and finds himself the secretary and favourite of the Duc de Lerme, we think for a moment that Gil Blas will raise himself into becoming a man of honour in certain respects; not at all: he has to do with dangers of another kind, and he succumbs. The stage alone is changed; the motives, the self-interest, the passions are still the same. Far from improving, he sinks, at this moment of intoxication, to the lowest degree of unworthiness

to which he has yet fallen—to insensibility of heart, to repudiation of his family and of his early friends. The highest point of his prosperity is precisely the moment when, if he does not take care, his real depravity begins. He needs disgrace to show him to himself, and to bring him back within the true line of his habits and his nature.

The fourth volume of *Gil Blas* did not appear till 1735, that is to say, twenty years after the first two, and eleven years after the third. This fourth volume, in which Gil Blas comes out of his retirement and returns for a time to Court, does not present either the same vicissitudes or the same rapidity of action as its predecessors; but it does not shame them. We find in it a sketch of the author's literary tastes, when he shows us his Gil Blas in the library of the Château de Lirias (a castle in Spain!) taking special pleasure in books of cheerful morality, and choosing as his favourite authors Horace, Lucian, and Erasmus.

The literary theory of Le Sage can be fully extracted from more than one page of *Gil Blas,* and particularly from the conversations of the latter with his friend, the poet Fabrice Nunez. Fabrice, in order to succeed, has consulted the taste of the times; he has indulged in the style of Gongora, that of far-fetched, involved expressions — the romanticism of those days. Gil Blas reproves him, and demands *clearness* first of all; he desires that even a sonnet should be perfectly intelligible. His friend jeers at his simplicity and ex-

plains the modern theory: "If the sonnet is not intelligible, so much the better, my friend. Sonnets, odes, and other works that need the sublime, can never get along with the simple and natural; obscurity is their whole merit; it is enough if the poet thinks he understands himself. . . . We are five or six bold innovators, who have undertaken to change the language from white to black; and we shall succeed, please God, in spite of Cervantes and Lope de Vega." In writing this, we may be sure that Le Sage had in mind Fontenelle, perhaps Montesquieu, certainly Voltaire, whom he thought much too super-elegant and always endeavouring to improve on the language of Racine, of Corneille, and their illustrious predecessors.

Boileau, as we know, did not smile upon the opening career of Le Sage. In his turn, Le Sage seems to have been little favourable to what is called the grand and lofty literature of his time, which he thought, stilted. This sort of dissenting opinion, carried sometimes to aversion, is visible in all the acts of his literary life. He quarrels early with the Comédie-Française, and makes open war upon it, and upon the actors of the king, who represent the grand style and tragic declamation. He devotes his attention to the little theatres, and himself, or with others, writes, a hundred little plays which represent in the germ, or even to the full, what to-day are vaudevilles, comic operas, and our pieces at the *Variétés* and on the boulevards.

He did not choose to belong to the French Academy. He resisted Danchet, his friend, who tried to entice him there; he absolutely refused to solicit votes, which proceeding was at that time necessary for election. He had aversion to "bureaus of intellect," such as the salon of the Marquise de Lambert; and, without mentioning his deafness, which embarassed him, he gives his reasons for this dislike. "In those companies they consider the best comedy or the gayest and cleverest comedy," he remarks (not without a little thought of his own), "as a feeble production that deserves no praise; whereas the slightest 'serious' work, an ode, an eclogue, a sonnet, is welcomed as the greatest effort of the human mind." He is positively opposed to makers of odes and tragedies, and to all solemn and official styles, those "crowned" styles, which the public respects and honours from etiquette without seeing that there is often infinitely more talent and intellect dispensed elsewhere. The authors of odes and tragedies paid him back in the same coin; Jean-Baptiste Rousseau exceeded all limits when he wrote to Brossette: "The author of *Le Diable boiteux* would do well to go into partnership with rope-dancers; his genius would then be in its true sphere. Gilles and Fagotin would have a good master; Apollo has a bad scholar." Voltaire had better wit than to refuse praise to *Gil Blas*, but he praises the work as little as possible. Judging by the two lines he bestows reluctantly upon it, he seems never to have suspected that it would soon

be infinitely more glorious to have written that novel than the poem of the *Henriade.*

Le Sage was a practical philosopher; he early preferred to follow his inclinations and obey his tastes rather than constrain himself. Man of genius, but independent by nature, he knew how, for the sake of his liberty, to renounce one part of that "consideration" he might so easily have conciliated. "We are valued in this world only at the value we choose to put upon ourselves," says La Bruyère. Le Sage knew that; but, in order to appear to every one just what he was, he never consented to pose before their eyes. He had too much contempt for the way men seek to make others believe in them. In his hatred of the solemn and the false he would have thrown himself, rather, on the side of the vulgar and the common. He prefers to haunt cafés rather than salons. He seems to have applied to himself that saying of an old classic: *Plebeius moriar senex!* May I return in old age to the obscure ranks from which, for a moment, I came! He plunged back with pleasure into the crowd, always finding new matter there for observation. He worked for the open-air theatres, and strewed his wit by the handful on the stages of the mountebanks; he had many successes not reputed creditable. I have just read his *Foire des Fées,* and his *Monde renversée,* and very pretty farces they are, truly. This vein, and this vogue of Le Sage as a vaudevillist deserve study, for, let us remark, it was not the necessity of a livelihood,

only, that turned him in that direction: the attraction and the vocation for it were in him. He did not deem it derogatory to write a part for Harlequin; he even descended, on one occasion, from Harlequin to puppets. Harlequin, puppets, actors for actors, he was of opinion that all were alike and were played by the same string.

Though that may be practical wisdom, we cannot deny that talent always loses something in not having a high ideal in view. Le Sage felt the effects of this: after attaining to the height of observation in *Le Diable boiteux,* and in *Gil Blas,* and to the quick of comedy in *Crispin,* and in *Turcaret,* he relaxed, he repeated himself, he dropped a little; he even went so far down as to allow himself certain last publications like the *Valise trouvée* and *Le Mélange Amusant,* which are, indeed, the bottom of his bag or valise.

Let us imagine Molière without Boileau at his side to spur him on, scold him, advise him on the noble comedy of the *Misanthrope;* Molière making a series of Georges Dandins, Scapins, and Pourceaugnacs in diminutive. Here is the misfortune that Le Sage, a sort of modified Molière, had to bear: he had no Aristarchus at his side, and he abandoned himself without reserve to the inclinations of his nature, while, at the same time, under the necessity of making a livelihood.

Le Sage was sixty-seven years of age when the last volume of *Gil Blas* appeared. Three years later (1738) he published *Le Bachelier de Salamanque,* which he valued, he said, as the fruit of his old age.

In this composition he followed his usual custom. While stating that it was taken from a Spanish manuscript, he filled it with French manners and customs, especially those of our little abbés, a class unknown in Spain; also with a description (to be found in the second part of the *Bachelier*) of the manners and customs in Mexico, which he took, without acknowledgment, from the narrative of an Irishman, Thomas Gage, translated many years earlier into French. But all these borrowings, these reports of others, and the things he added of his own invention, are united and blended together, as usual, in the course of an easy and amusing narrative.

Another work of his, and by no means the least admirable, was the comedian Montménil, his son, an excellent actor, whom all who saw him act declared inimitable. Montménil, who was for a time an abbé, but who could not resist his vocation, played Turcaret and the Avocat Patelin admirably; he also played the marquis in *Turcaret,* the valet La Branche in *Crispin,* and, in general, excelled in the parts of valets and peasants. It can be said that he acted as his father wrote and narrated. Montménil merely translated into another form the same comic spirit, the same family talent. Le Sage would not, for some time, forgive his son for becoming an actor, and, above all, an actor at the Comédie Française, with which he was perpetually at war in the interests of his Théâtre de la Foire. But one day friends dragged him to a

representation of *Turcaret;* there he saw his son, recognised his double work, wept with joy, and became once more a father. And so much a father that the death of Montménil, which occurred suddenly in 1743, was the great affliction of his old age.

"Le Sage, having lost Montménil, and being too old to work, too proud to ask help, and too honest to borrow, retired with his wife and daughters to the house of his son, the canon, at Boulogne-sur-mer." It is the Abbé de Voisenon who speaks. Voisenon was then grand-vicar to the Bishop of Boulogne. The canon, son of Le Sage, to whose house the old father went to finish his days, was a joyous good-liver himself. "He knew imperturbably all the plays of La Foire, and could sing them even better than his Mass." Ecclesiastic, of about the same force as the Abbé de Voisenon, he would have made a capital actor. Le Sage had still another son, who became an actor, and travelled about Germany under the name of Pittence; he resembled the least good works of his father.

Le Sage was deaf, and became so at forty years of age. This affliction, which increased with years, must have contributed to keep him from the salons of the great world, but it did not check in the least his natural gaiety. He was obliged, in conversing, to use a trumpet, which he called his "benefactor," inasmuch, he said, as he used it to communicate with persons of intellect, and need only lay it down to avoid hearing bores and fools. Towards the end of

his life, he did not have full use of his faculties, except in the middle of the day; those about him remarked that his mind seemed to rise and set with the sun. He died at Boulogne, November 17, 1747, in his eightieth year. The Comte de Tressan, then governor of the province, made it his duty to attend the funeral with his staff. Death placed Le Sage in his true rank; and he, who had never been of any consequence in his lifetime, and who was never mentioned without a little word of complaint and regret being mingled with his praise, is to-day classed in the memory of men after the Lucians and the Terences, beside the Fieldings and the Goldsmiths, and beneath the Cervantes and the Molières.

Montesquieu.

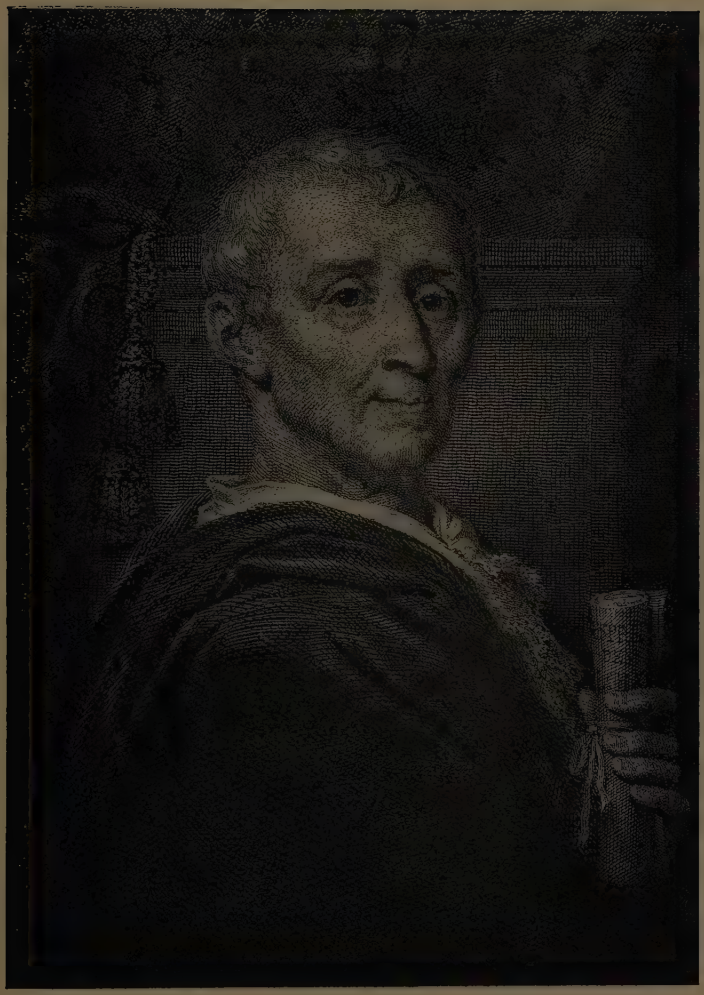
Montesquieu.

(Charles de Secondat, Baron de La Brède.)

"THE worst of journalists is that they speak only of new books, as if truth were never new. It seems to me that until a man has read all the old books he has no reason to prefer the new." It is Usbek, or rather Montesquieu, who says that in the *Lettres Persanes,* and it is fair to apply the words to himself. In looking over the field of the eighteenth century, in every direction, I have many times encountered the great name and the imposing figure of Montesquieu, without pausing over them. Why? For many reasons. The first is, that he is one of those men whom we approach with fear, because of the real respect they inspire and the sort of religion that has grown up around them. The second reason is that he has been so ably spoken of by masters that it seems useless to repeat feebly what has already been so well said. A final reason, and one which is peculiar to this order of sketches, is that in writing for journals one is always something of a journalist; we search for the timely, we await the occasion, and, without precisely binding ourselves to speak of none

but works "still hot from the forge" (another of Montesquieu's expressions), we desire, at any rate, that some natural circumstance should bring us back to old books and direct attention to them.

I have always hoped to find something of the kind in respect to Montesquieu. We have good and eloquent Eulogies upon him; but a complete History of his life and works does not exist. We know many details about him, but not as many as ought to have been collected, and as we desire to know. He left a great number of manuscripts; it was said at first that his son, M. de Secondat, towards the close of 1793, when blood began to flow in Bordeaux, threw all his father's papers and manuscripts into the fire, from a fear that pretexts might be found in them to trouble the family. It was a risk of death in those days to be the son of Montesquieu or of Buffon; and the only safety was to keep that fact out of sight. One of the first acts of the mad-brained clubs in Paris was to declare Montesquieu an aristocrat and an imbecile. But this news of the destruction of his manuscripts proved false; and M. Walckenaer, the great biographical investigator, had the pleasure of thus informing the lettered public. The greater part of these manuscripts was brought to Paris about the year 1804, and M. Walckenaer, in acknowledgment of his zeal, was allowed to examine them for several hours; he wrote a letter on the subject which was inserted in the *Archives littéraires de l'Europe,* accompanied by



MONTESQUIEU.
After the painting by Deveria.

a few extracts. Since then, M. Lainé, the former minister of the Interior, obtained permission of the Secondat family to make further researches among the precious papers, and he meditated a work on Montesquieu which remained a mere project. Let us hope that this family inheritance still exists, and that it may finally be put to use in the interests of all, and to the glory of the illustrious ancestor. Montesquieu is not one of the men who have anything to fear from close knowledge; he was a great man seen near by or far off; he had no recesses in his heart to conceal; all those who approached him have praised his goodness, his kindliness, as much as they have his genius. The few notes of his that have seen the light, and in which he draws his portrait, give a life and naturalness to his personality which are better than majesty. "Plutarch charms me always," he says: "there are circumstances attached to persons that give great pleasure."

Born on the 18th of January, 1689, at the château of La Brède, near Bordeaux, Montesquieu came of a family of the robe and the sword, belonging to the good nobility of Guienne: "Though my name is neither good nor bad," he said, "having little more than two hundred and fifty years of proved nobility, still I am attached to it." His father, who had been in the army, retired early and carefully superintended his son's education. Young Montesquieu was destined to the magistracy. Study was at all times his

great passion. Mention is made of precocious and rather daring works which he produced, but had the prudence to withhold. He read pen in hand, and reflectingly. "On leaving school, they put books on law into my hands; I looked for the spirit in them." This spirit of the things of law and of history was the object of his search through life; he never rested till he thought he had found it. His genius was essentially turned to this class of investigation. He had, further, a gift of ready imagination, which easily clothed both thought and maxim with a poetic form, as did his compatriot Montaigne; but he was less easy than Montaigne; he had not the same grace of style.

The classics were to him objects of worship. He never knew much of that first simple, natural, artless antiquity of which Fénelon, like an exiled contemporary among us, was the exponent. Montesquieu's antiquity went no farther back than the second period, which was more reflective, more astir, and already Latin; or, to put it more truly, perhaps, he confounded his classics together, from Homer to Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, obtaining from them all features or illusions to enhance his modern thought. These he used like Corinthian vases or bronze busts placed in conspicuous places as glorious testimonials. A line of Homer, a verse of Virgil, blended rapidly with his thought, seemed to him to complete it, and consecrate it under a divine form. Montesquieu's work is inlaid throughout with these sacred fragments: "I confess my love for the

ancients," he exclaims; "antiquity enchants me, and I am always ready to say with Pliny: 'It is to Athens that you go; respect the gods!'"—And he, himself, feeling thus, deserves to be treated as a classic: to quote Montesquieu, to detach a saying of his and place it in a writing, honours the writer.

Counsellor of the parliament at Bordeaux from 1714, the death of an uncle left him the office of president of the municipal court in 1716; he was then twenty-seven years of age. Speaking of his friend the Maréchal de Berwick as being at the head of a regiment and governor of a province while still adolescent, Montesquieu said: "Thus, at seventeen years of age he was in the situation, so auspicious for a man with a lofty soul, of seeing the road to glory open before him with every possibility of doing great things." Without pretending to say the same of his office of judge, obtained so early, Montesquieu was thenceforth on a footing where he could see all, where he could judge men on their own level, without making efforts to insinuate himself among them; he had only to choose his relations with them as they offered. It was thus that he knew Maréchal de Berwick, governor of the province, so intimately. Born without ambition of great fortune, he found himself placed in a rank which might seem mediocre compared with great stations, but which was all the more suited to his chosen rôle of political observer. He could apply his whole youth to that rôle, without losing anything.

For ten years Montesquieu conscientiously filled this office of magistrate; then, finding himself, as his studies became more extended, too confined, he sold his charge in 1726. He recognised, himself, that he was not fitted for public employments, nor even for what is called a profession.

"What has always given me a rather bad opinion of myself," he said, "is that there are very few employments in the republic for which I should be truly fitted. As for my office of Judge, I have a very just heart, I readily comprehend questions in themselves; but as to legal procedure, I never understood it. Nevertheless, I applied myself to learn it; but what disgusted me the most was to see stupid fellows possess the very talent that escaped me, so to speak."

From this we may infer that Montesquieu was not practical. Would he have been more in his right place as Chancellor of France than he was as judge of a municipal court? Honest man like d'Aguesseau, man of Letters and philosopher like Bacon, would he have been more capable of business affairs than they? A letter, written at the beginning of his travels, shows that he had a momentary idea of becoming an ambassador and being employed at foreign Courts; but what is certain is that he remained such as we know him and admire him—the great, the immortal investigator of the spirit of history, often venturesome, but always fruitful.

The first writings that we have of his are Discourses composed for the Academy of Bordeaux, of which he was a member after 1716; in them his talent shows itself; and we see, as its origin, the

particular form which Montesquieu afterwards delighted in, namely: classic imagery or illusion applied to modern objects and ideas. But here we perceive affectation; the mythology is too profuse. Writing a report on the physical cause of the Echo, or a treatise on Anatomy, Montesquieu brings in too many nymphs and goddesses. At this period, he visibly imitated Fontenelle, whose clever Reports to the Academy of Sciences were made to charm. Was it Fontenelle or Montesquieu who wrote the following passage on the discoveries in physics which, after letting themselves be awaited for ages, burst forth suddenly, one after another, from Galileo to Newton: "One would say that Nature acted like those virgins who long preserved their most precious possession, and then allowed themselves to be ravished in a moment of that they had preserved with such care, and defended with such constancy."

And here is another thought that makes a singular appearance in a Report written by Montesquieu on the "Usage of the Renal Glands": "Truth seems sometimes as though it ran to meet those who seek it; often there is no interval between desire, hope, and enjoyment." Montesquieu, as academician of the Sciences of Bordeaux, certainly paid tribute to the style in vogue and to his admiration for Fontenelle.

What we like better to observe in these first essays of Montesquieu is the love of science, and of study applied to all objects. We have not only his

Reports on the work of others, but his own "Observations" on natural history, read in 1721. He had studied under the microscope a little red insect, a plant of misletoe, and oak lichens; he had dissected a frog; he had made researches into the nutritive qualities of various vegetables. The author declared that he attached no greater importance to these observations and experiments than they deserved: "They are the fruit of country idleness. They may die in the region that gave birth to them; but those who live in society have duties to fulfil; we owe it to ours to give account of even our amusements." In closing this report, he almost seems to be endeavouring to lessen the merit of an observer; whereas the latter has need of all his subtlety of mind and his skill of invention to bring out the fact that is under his eyes:

"It does not need much intellect," says Montesquieu, "to see the Pantheon, the Coliseum, or the Pyramids; and it does not need much more to see a worm under a microscope, or a star through a telescope; it is in this that physics are so admirable: great geniuses, narrow minds, and second-rate people can all take a part. He who could not compose a system like Newton can make an observation which would put that great philosopher on the rack. Nevertheless, Newton is always Newton, that is to say, the successor of Descartes, and the other man is a common man, a worthless artist, who saw once, and perhaps never thought at all."

We ought to see in these words, not contempt of fact, but the subordination of fact to idea, which is a characteristic of Montesquieu. He does justice elsewhere to observation when he says: "It is the history of physics; systems are its fable." Thus Montes-

quieu, at the beginning of his career, busied himself with science, as Buffon did soon after, and as Goethe did later; he furnished funds for a prize in Anatomy, and seemed to aim only at serious results in keeping with the gravity of his profession.

But during the time that he worked at these "Observations" on the objects of natural history, he gave forth another work, by the way, for which he had needed no microscope; his own eyes had served him well enough. The *Lettres Persanes* appeared, without name of author, in 1721; and they instantly had a success that marks a date and made it the book of the epoch.

The *Lettres Persanes* is one of the three great books of Montesquieu's life—for in truth he wrote but three: these *Lettres* (1721); his admirable work, *Le Grandeur et la Décadence des Romains* (1734), which is only a detached episode in advance of his third and last great book, *L'Esprit des Lois* (1748). The manner of these three works differs, but not as much as one would think. The basis of the ideas differs still less. The book on the Romans is the one in which the writer restrains himself most; he is master of himself from first to last; his tone is firm, lofty, simple, and wholly on the level of the majesty of the People-king. In the *Esprit des Lois,* he often mingles, one hardly knows how, epigram with grandeur. In the *Lettres Persanes,* Montesquieu, then young, sports and takes his pleasure; but gravity is found in his play; the

greater part of his ideas are there in the germ,—better, indeed, than in the germ, they are developing. He is more indiscreet than he is later; and it is in this sense principally that he is less mature. He will retain most of his ideas, but, in his future works, he will not produce them in the same way; he will reflect them differently, and will speak of them only with gravity, feeling more and more the grandeur of the social institution, and desiring the ennobling of human nature.

If we desire to estimate Montesquieu's nature and quality of mind, we must remember what he wrote himself, towards the close of his life, to d'Alembert, who asked of him (for *l'Encyclopédie*) certain articles on points he had already treated in the *Esprit des Lois:* "I have," he said, "drawn from my brain on those topics all that was in it. My mind is a mould; all that comes out of it looks alike; therefore I could only say for you what I have said, and perhaps say it worse than I did." This fundamental oneness of mould in Montesquieu is felt through all his great variety of productions, from his first to his last work.

That which gives the *Lettres Persanes* their date and the stamp of the Regency, is the touch of irreverence and libertinism, which comes in to lighten the background and season the book to the taste of the day. Where did Montesquieu get the idea of making Persians talk in that way, putting his own thoughts under that slender disguise? It is said that he owed the idea to Dufresny, who, in a book entitled *Amuse-*

ments sérieux et comiques, imagines, by way of variety, a Siamese in Paris, dropping from the clouds in the midst of the Rue Saint Honoré, and making reflections in his own way. Persons who have studied English literature prefer to think that Montesquieu had in mind a letter supposed to be written from London by an Indian of the island of Java, which can be read in Addison's "Spectator." But the idea, whether it belonged to the Siamese or the man from Java, became original in Montesquieu through the development that he gave to it, and the boldness with which he naturalised it in Paris. The *Lettres Persanes,* with all their defects, is one of the books of genius which our literature has produced.

Usbek and Rica, two friends, two Persians of rank, leave their country and make a journey to Europe. Usbek, the principal personage, has a harem at Ispahan, and on leaving Persia he commits it to the care of the Grand Eunuch, a black man, whom he reminds, from time to time, of his strict injunctions. In this harem are women whom he loves exceedingly, and the author would not be sorry to interest us in this romantic topic, very choice in its Asiatic taste and carefully studied. He succeeded, no doubt, in doing so at that date—1721; the libertine, or, to speak correctly, the licentious part of the *Lettres Persanes,* the perpetual details of eunuchs, passions, practices, and almost of utensils, on which the imagination of readers could dwell with pleasure, required a society that

enjoyed the novels of Crébillon *fils*. To-day, this part seems to us artificial, dead; and, if it were longer, intolerably wearisome. What pleases us, and what we seek in these *Lettres*, is Montesquieu himself, slightly disguised among his various personages, and judging, under that transparent mask, the manners and customs, the ideas—in short, the whole social life of his youth.

Rica is a satirist, Parisian from the first day, and painting with a jest the eccentricities and absurdities of the queer characters who pass before his eyes, and with whom he gets along very well. Usbek, more serious, resists and reasons; he takes up questions, he propounds and discusses them in letters which he addresses to the theologians of his own country. The art of the work, and what, through the apparent mixture, shows the talent of composition, is that, side by side with a harem letter, there will be one on free-will. An ambassador from Persia to Muscovy writes a half-page to Usbek about the Tartars, which might be a chapter in the *Esprit des Lois*. Rica, on the one hand, writes the cleverest criticism on the chatter of Frenchmen and on the talkers with nothing to say in society; on the other, Usbek discusses God and justice in a very noble and far-reaching letter. The idea of justice, independent in itself, is therein explained under the true principles of the social institution. Montesquieu (for it is he who speaks here, as he spoke in his own name to the end of his life),

tries to establish in what respect that idea of justice does not depend on human conventions: "If it did so depend," he adds, "it would be a terrible truth that we should have to conceal from ourselves."

Montesquieu goes farther. He tries to render the idea and the worship of justice independent of all existence higher than man; he goes so far as to say, through the mouth of Usbek: "If there were no God, we ought always to love justice; that is to say, we should make efforts to resemble that Being, of whom we have so lofty an idea, and who, if he existed, would necessarily be just. Free as we may be from the yoke of religion, we cannot be free from that of equity."

Here we touch the very foundation of Montesquieu's thought, and of all his habitual mental procedure; let us not be weak or wavering, let us not hesitate to expose the truth in its nudity. He says still further:

"Even if the immortality of the soul is an error, I should be sorry not to believe it: I own that I am not so humble as the atheists. I do not know what they think, but, for my part, I do not choose to barter the idea of my immortality for that of the beatitude of to-day. I am glad to believe myself as immortal as God himself. Independently of revealed ideas, metaphysical ideas give me a very strong hope of my eternal happiness which I do not choose to renounce."

In these words we have the measure of Montesquieu's belief and his noble desire: even in the expression of that desire, the supposition glides in that "even if the thing did not exist" it would be best to believe in it. I do not blame that homage rendered,

in any case, to the elevation and the idealisation of human nature; but I cannot help remarking that it is taking and accepting the ideas of justice and of religion on the political and social side and not potentially in themselves. Montesquieu, when, by degrees, he freed himself from the irony of the *Lettres Persanes,* came more and more to respect the objects of human veneration and conscience. Not that I think he entered into them with more personal feeling, for in the midst of his most majestic parts a sort of barrenness is felt. He has ideas, but he has not, it has been remarked, civic feelings. A sort of life is lacking, a tie that binds: we feel the powerful brain, but not the heart. I think it incumbent on me to note, if not this weak side, at least this cold side of a great man.

One of his thoughts has always impressed me:—"Fontenelle," he said, "is as much above other men by his heart as he is above all men of Letters by his mind." I have read and re-read those words and, recalling what Fontenelle was, I thought they ought to read: "Fontenelle as much *below* other men in heart."—But no, it seems really to be eulogy that Montesquieu desired to make of Fontenelle; and he adds an excellent quality in such a man: "He praises others without reluctance." What Montesquieu really admired in Fontenelle was equanimity, absence of envy, breadth, prudence, and, perhaps, indifference. The only conclusion that I seek to draw from this is, that, very superior to Fontenelle in talent and as a

writer, he was, more or less, of the same religion in morals.

The following memorable confessions of Montesquieu are often quoted:

"Study has been to me a sovereign remedy against the vexations of life, having never had an annoyance that one hour's reading did not dissipate."

"I wake in the morning with an inward joy at seeing the light; I see the light with a sort of transport, and all the rest of the day I am content. I pass the night without waking; in the evening, when I go to bed, a species of torpor prevents me from making reflections."

"I am nearly always as content with fools as with men of intellect . . . etc."

Man of study and of thought, detached rather early from passions, and having at no time been led away by them, he lived and dwelt in the steadiness of intellect. Very kind in private life, natural and simple, he deserved to be loved by all around him as a man of genius can be; but even in his most human aspects we still find this stiff, indifferent side; a benevolent and lofty equity rather than tenderness of soul.

Who does not know that fine act in his life when at Marseilles, where he often went to visit his sister. Wishing one day to go out in a boat, he met a young man named Robert who, with none of the manners or tone of a sailor, offered to take him. The young man, while rowing the boat, told him he did that sort of work only on Sundays and fête-days, in order to earn all he could for the purpose of buying his father, who had been taken prisoner by a corsair, and was

then a slave in Tetuan. Montesquieu informed himself carefully on the facts of the matter before parting from the young man at the wharf. Some months later, the father, freed from slavery, returned to his family, not knowing whence the unhoped-for succour had come. You weep; but wait! — admire, but do not shed tears. Two or three years later, the young man, who feels sure it was his unknown passenger to whom he owed the deliverance of his father, meets him on the quay and flings himself at his feet in gratitude, entreating him to come and see the family he has rendered so happy. Montesquieu brusquely draws back, denies everything, refuses to go with the young man, and tears himself without pity from a legitimate gratitude. It was not until his death that the benefaction was revealed. Here I seem to see in Montesquieu one of those gods who are benefactors of humanity without human tenderness. It is thus that in the "Hippolytus" of Euripides, Diana, at the moment the young hero is about to die, moves away, though she seemed to have loved him: but however friendly to mortals were these gods of antiquity, tears were forbidden to their eyes — the God-Man had not yet come.

In this view which I have allowed myself to express on the moral nature of Montesquieu, and which his *Lettres Persanes* called forth, far be it from me to diminish the severe yet human beauty of his character. I content myself by defining it, and by describing that

stoical humanity in so far as it was apart from charity as shown by Pascal and Bossuet.

All the questions of the day under the Regency are touched upon in the *Lettres Persanes* — the dispute of the ancients and moderns, the revocation of the Edict of Nantes and its effects, the quarrel concerning the Bull *Unigenitus,* and so forth; the author serves the spirit of the day by mingling his views with it; the reign of Louis XIV is sharply attacked with a backward thrust. In the famous episode of the Troglodytes, Montesquieu relates, after his manner, his dream of Salente. In the portraits of the Farmer-general, the Director, the Casuist, the Man *à bonnes fortunes,* the Gambling Wife, Montesquieu equals La Bruyère in recollection. He resembles him also in language, but without intending it. His own language, while it is quite as new, is perhaps less complicated; it has a clearness and a singularly picturesque quality. The Casuist wishes to show that a man of his profession is necessary to certain persons, who, without aiming at perfection, wish to secure their salvation: "As they have no ambition," he says, "they do not care for the chief places; thus they enter Paradise as righteous as they can. Provided they get there, that is enough for them." Elsewhere, speaking of men whose conversation is only a mirror in which they exhibit nothing but their own impertinent faces: "Oh! how insipid praise is," he exclaims, "when it reflects back to the place whence it came!" The

whole style is clear, pungent, full of wit, a little thin and sharp, and occasionally incorrect.

But Montesquieu has certain free and easy ideas as to style. "A man who writes well," he thinks, "does not write as other people write, but as *he* writes; and often it is when he speaks ill that he speaks well." He writes, therefore, in his own manner; and that manner, always refined and lively, becomes strong and proud and rises higher with his topics. I have said that he liked and even delighted in a style of imagery or of picturesque comparisons to elucidate his thought: for example, wishing to make Rica say that the husband of a pretty woman in France, if he is worsted at home, takes his revenge on the wives of others:

"This title of husband of a pretty woman," he writes, "which is so carefully concealed in Asia, is borne in France without uneasiness. Men feel they have opportunity to find compensation everywhere. A prince consoles himself for the loss of a fortress by capturing another; when the Turks took Bagdad from us did we not take the fortress of Kandahar in Mongol-Tartary from them?"

Exactly in the same manner Montesquieu, in the *Esprit des Lois,* describing an English Utopian who, having under his eyes the image of true liberty, goes about imagining quite another liberty in his book, says: "He built Chalcedonia, having the shores of Byzantium before his eyes." In Montesquieu's thought, at the moment when we least expect it, suddenly the summits glow.

Amid the audacity and the irreverence of the *Lettres*

Persanes, a spirit of prudence is observable in Usbek's pen. While discussing questions so well and occasionally letting daylight into them, Usbek (and here, perhaps, is a contradiction that Montesquieu failed to avoid), continues to remain faithful to the laws of his country and to his religion. "It is true," he says, "that, by a caprice that comes more from the nature than from the mind of men, it is sometimes necessary to change certain laws, but the case is rare; and when it does occur, it should be touched with a *trembling hand.*" Rica himself, light-hearted jester, remarking that in courts of justice when judgment is to be pronounced the votes of the majority are taken, adds, by way of epigram: "But they say they have found by experience that it would be better to take those of the minority; and that is natural enough, for there are very few just minds, and all the world agrees that there are quantities of unjust ones." This is enough to show that the mind that dictated the *Lettres Persanes* would never push things to extremity on the side of reform and popular revolution.

After touching upon questions which belong properly to the philosophy of history, after expressing astonishment that Frenchmen should have abandoned the old laws made by their first kings in the assemblies of the nation, and, having thus reached the threshold of the great work he no doubt foresaw in the future, Montesquieu resumes his laughter over many subjects, and when he has laughed enough he stops

short. The *Lettres Persanes,* having exhausted the picture and the satire of present manners and morals, turns to the romantic: Usbek receives news that his harem, profiting by his absence, has made a revolution; all are in rebellion, flying at each other's throats, and killing one another. It is a voluptuous and delirious conclusion, a "fire and blood" end, that has nothing relating to us in it. All this sensual part is dry and hard, showing that Montesquieu's imagination lay solely in the direction of historical and moral observation. Once more I remark that there is in the *Lettres Persanes,* from beginning to end, and viewed as a whole, a resemblance to the novels of Crébillon *fils.*

Le Temple de Gnide, published in 1725, was an error of taste and a misconception of talent. Montesquieu thought he was imitating the Greeks in making this little prose poem out of complaisance to a princess of the Condé blood, Mademoiselle de Clermont. He was thirty-five years old at that time, and he wrote: "At thirty-five years of age, I still loved." But Montesquieu's loves seem never to have troubled or touched him much. In vain he paints his Thémire: he still seems to us more sensual in love than sentimental: "In my youth," he says, "I was fortunate in attaching myself to women who I thought loved me; as soon as I ceased to think so I detached myself from them suddenly." And he adds: "I liked fairly well to talk insipidities to women and to do them

services that cost me little." *Le Temple de Gnide* is one of those insipidities, but it must have cost him some labour. M. Lainé relates that when he obtained permission from the Secondat family to make researches among Montesquieu's papers, he found in the secretary, which no one had opened since the death of the great writer, a mass of rough drafts of all his love-letters. The author of the *Temple de Gnide* worked over and made erasures even in his *billets-doux*, and we feel it in reading that tale. What in Montesquieu is vigour and nervous energy in great things, is stiffness in little ones. He has no grace.

About this time, Montesquieu was much more in his true line when he delivered, before the Academy of Bordeaux in 1725, a short Discourse in praise of Study and the Sciences. He avenges the Sciences, having questioned their utility in one part of the *Lettres Persanes;* he asserts, in a witty and original manner, that knowledge being gained, the intellectual result thereof is often the indirect and distant cause of the salvation of society. For instance, if the Mexicans had had a Descartes before the landing of the Spaniards, Fernando Cortez would not have conquered them; for the awe they had of the Spaniards under the idea that these strangers were gods, was "only a simple effect of their ignorance of a principle of philosophy." Courage was never lacked by either the Mexicans or the Peruvians, "only hope of success. Thus a false principle of philosophy, ignorance of a

physical cause, enervated in a moment all the forces of two great empires."

In this little Discourse, Montesquieu speaks magnificently of study, and of the motives that ought to lead us to it. "The first is the inward satisfaction we feel when we see the excellence of our own being increase, and know that we render an intelligent being more intelligent." Another motive, which he did not go far from himself to find,

> "is," he says, "our own happiness. The love of a lady is almost the only eternal passion in us; all others quit us as, little by little, this miserable machine which gives them to us nears its ruin. . . . We should make ourselves a happiness that can follow us through the ages; life is so short that we ought to count as nothing all felicity that does not last as long as ourselves."

Finally, he gives another motive, and one which he feels equally, usefulness to the public and to the world: "Is it not a noble purpose to work that we may leave behind us men more fortunate and happier than we have been?" Montesquieu, through integrity of heart and guidance of his intellect, was naturally a citizen of the race of the Vaubans, the Catinats, the Turennes, the L'Hôpitals, of all those who sincerely desire the welfare and honour of their country and of mankind: "I have always felt an inward joy," he says, "when a law has been made which served the common welfare."

The *Lettres Persanes* ranked him, whether he would or no, among literary men. He felt the advantages to

his reputation, and the hindrances to his career. A powerful impulsion moved him henceforth to fulfil his destiny as a writer, and he acted upon it. He freed himself from his bonds, sold his office, was received, in 1726, into the French Academy (although, like the rest of the world, he laughed at it before he belonged to it), and undertook his travels in the spring of 1728, beginning with Germany and Hungary. In Vienna he saw much of Prince Eugène; arriving in Venice, he had the pleasure of meeting Bonneval, who had not yet passed over to the Turks; he visited Turin, Rome, Italy, returning by way of Switzerland, the Rhine, and Holland, concluding his course of observations in England (October, 1729). He was introduced to the latter country by Lord Chesterfield, the most enlightened of guides; he saw all, and he saw well. Before arriving there, he had travelled on the continent with an Englishman, Lord Waldegrave, and had said already: "There are no men of true common-sense but those who are born in England."

A few *Notes* from his journal have been published, which relate to his stay in London. He remarks that, in his time, ambassadors and foreign ministers knew no more of England than a babe of six months; the freedom of the press misled them: "As they see the devil in the periodical press they are led to believe that the people are on the verge of rebellion; but they should bear in mind that in England, as elsewhere, the people are dissatisfied with the ministers, and that the people

write openly what is only thought elsewhere." Montesquieu appreciates this liberty "which every man demands and enjoys over there—a slater has the newspaper brought to him on the roof and reads it there." But he has no illusions on the state of the country and its institutions; he rightly judges the corruption of political morals, the venality of consciences and of votes, the practical and calculating side of things, the fear of being duped which leads to hardness. He seems almost to have believed that a revolution was at hand; but we know how the political condition, very debased in those days of Sir Robert Walpole, improved and gained new vigour under Pitt. Though he saw these evils, Montesquieu thoroughly appreciated the advantages that compensated for them; he expresses his appreciation thus: "England is at present the freest country that there is in the world; I except no republic. . . . If a man in England had as many enemies as he has hairs upon his head, no harm could come to him: that is a great thing, for health of soul is as necessary as health of body."

A prophetic glance darts like a flash of lightning through the following sentence, thrown out in passing, and certainly predicts the emancipation of English America: "I do not know what will happen to the many inhabitants sent from Europe and Africa to the West Indies; but I think that if any nation is abandoned by her colonies, England will be the first."

I confess, in all humility, even if I do a wrong to

my sentiment of the ideal, that if we could have, in its consecutive entirety, Montesquieu's *Journal de Voyage,* the whole of these *Notes* so simple, so natural in their sincere and primitive setting forth, I should prefer the reading of them to that of the *Esprit des Lois,* and I should believe them to be more useful.

In Montesquieu's great work the artist counts for much; many things are said in it which are open to doubt. The author-artist is there in presence of his subject, of his vast study; he wants a law, he searches for it, and sometimes he creates it. From the accumulation of texts and notes which he has brought before him, and which press upon him and almost overwhelm him, he frees himself, he chooses his course; his work springs up. Boldly, sometimes painfully, he begins his *Considérations* and his perspective; he fashions them to suit himself. Was it not he who, in the privacy of his own study, said: "Histories are false facts composed on true facts."

And did he not say, still further: "In history we see men painted in noble portraits, but we do not find them to be what we see them." How is it, then, when the spirit of history alone is sought? Men are seen at too great a distance; the human stuff which the statesman should consider too often disappears in Montesquieu.

I spoke just now of the *useful:* Montesquieu joined to it an idea of the beautiful. He had a sacred pattern within him; he raised a temple, and the crowd

flocked to it. But did he not set up in it certain idols?

Let us lay aside regrets, and accept respectfully the unique and regal form of his *Considérations,* which is peculiarly his own; a form born of a mind so lofty and so firm, and bearing the imprint of a mould which, with all the fine accessories that characterised it, will not be met with again.

On his return to France, Montesquieu retired to his château of La Brède, far from the suppers of Paris, in order to collect and arrange his thoughts; he remained there two years, seeing only his books and his trees. He was full of England when he arrived, and had to repress and postpone the idea of writing a book on that original Government, so unlike our own, which tempted him much. He gave the preference to his *Considérations sur les Causes de la Grandeur des Romains et de leur Décadence* (1734), which has remained the most classic and perfect of his works; the only one, indeed, that seems to have been cast in a single mould like a statue.

The works of Montesquieu are nothing else than the philosophic summing up and the ideal review of his studies; no one reasons better than he on history when he has closed the book that contains the narrative. He expresses the thought in it; he gives it continuity, connectedness, counsel; and that which makes the beauty of what he says is the manner in which it is put forth. He advances with a firm step, by a series

of vivid and compact reflections, which, as a whole, have the grand air; his wit is also quick, brief, and is aimed high.

This style of seeing and speaking was marvellously well suited for application to the Romans. To judge of the book of *Considérations* which he gave to them, we should have to examine what had been said before him on that subject, and render to Machiavelli, Saint-Évremond, Saint Réal, that which is their due; and as for form we should have to place the historic discourses of Montesquieu side by side with those of Bossuet.

The nature of Montesquieu's mind is so completely that of reasoning upon history, that he does it where there is no call for it, and where the grounds are insufficient; as, for instance, on the beginnings of Rome. Before making reflections on what he had read, he ought to have asked himself whether the historians spoke the truth; there was criticism to be made on the books and on the traditions that were semi-fabulous. Montesquieu does not make it. From the statement that Romulus took the shield of the Sabines, which was large, in place of the small shield he had hitherto used, Montesquieu jumps to the conclusion that a certain custom and a certain policy was in practice among the Romans to borrow from the vanquished whatever they had that was better than their own.

It is not until the period of Hannibal and the Punic

wars, that Montesquieu's thought develops with ease, and that he commands his whole subject. Chapter VI, on the policy of the Romans, and on their conduct at the submission of other peoples, is a masterpiece, in which prudence and majesty are combined; the grand style begins here, never to cease again. In speaking of the Romans, Montesquieu's language becomes like Latin; it takes a character of firm conciseness that brings it near to the language of Tacitus or Sallust; there is study, profound combination, effort, as with Sallust, to attain to propriety of expression in words, and to conciseness; also to make the image, as in Tacitus, both magnificent and brief, and to imprint on the whole diction something grave and august.

No one has entered more fully than Montesquieu into the ideal of the Roman genius; he is, by inclination, favourable to the Senate, and something of a patrician of the ancient Republic. It should be remarked that he who spoke so admiringly of Alexander, Charlemagne, Trajan, and Marcus Aurelius is less generous on the subject of Cæsar; at any rate, he does not speak of him as if he were under a sort of enchantment, as he does of those other great mortals. He is angry with him for having been the potential instrument of the great transformation of the Roman world. Montesquieu (if we except the *Lettres Persanes*) always used noble words in relation to Christianity, and, as he advanced in life, he more and more accepted and, so to speak, espoused its benefits in all

that concerned civilisation and humanity. Nevertheless, he had for pure Roman nature anterior to all Christian influence, for the stoical Roman nature, a predilection that he never concealed. The suicides of Cato and Brutus inspired him with reflections in which there is, perhaps, a sort of classic idolatry, and even some prestige: "It is certain," he exclaims, "that men have become less free, less courageous, less inclined to great enterprises than they were when, through that power which they possessed over themselves, they could, at any moment, escape from every other power." He says this again in the *Esprit des Lois,* apropos of what the ancients called *virtue:* "When they had that quality in full force," he says, "men did things we see no longer in these days, and which, if we saw them, would astound our little souls."

Montesquieu divined many things, ancient or modern; about those even of which he had seen the least in his day—free government, civil wars, imperial government. One might make a piquant extract of such predictions or allusions taken from his works. Let us beware of that method which draws to self a great mind and turns it from its broad and special path. In all that Montesquieu foresaw and divined, one thing is lacking to make him wholly himself, and to complete the education of his genius,—he did not foresee the revolution. He did not believe that, in our day, proscriptions or wholesale spoliations would be possible.

Speaking of those of the Romans, he says: "We can draw this advantage from the smallness of our fortunes —they are safer; we are not worth enough to have our property torn from us." Montesquieu did not conceive that there could be a day, a near day, when the Clergy in a body would be dispossessed, and the Nobles also, in a great measure; when the chief heads of the Parliament of Paris were to fall upon the scaffold; he did not divine a 1793.

I desired to read Machiavelli in comparison with Montesquieu; the latter is the true refutation, or, at any rate, the true corrective. With Machiavelli, we are always closer to natural corruption, to primitive cupidity; Machiavelli distrusts himself; Montesquieu does not. It was Machiavelli who said that there is in all men a hidden, vicious inclination, which awaits only the opportunity to show itself, and needs all civil laws, supported by force of arms, to repress it. Men, according to him, never do right unless they cannot do otherwise: "And when they have that choice, and the liberty to do evil with impunity, they never fail to cause confusion and disorder everywhere." Machiavelli is convinced that, although men may seem to change in the course of a given state of things, fundamentally they do not change, and, certain occasions returning, we find them absolutely the same. Montesquieu is not wholly convinced of that truth. At the opening of the *Esprit des Lois,* he goes so far as to say that the first men supposed to be savages and

children of nature, were, above all, timid, and wanted *peace:* as if physical cupidity, want, and hunger, the blind consciousness that all youth has of its own force, and "that rage for domination innate in the human heart," would not engender from the very first, conflict and warfare. This criticism is fundamental, and bears, as I think, on the whole of the *Esprit des Lois.* Montesquieu grants too much, not only outwardly, but secretly in his own mind, to the decorum of human nature. This defect in Montesquieu is infinitely honourable, but a real defect, none the less. Admirable explainer and classifier of the past and of those accomplished things that have no present consequences, he is likely to lead into error those who take him at his word about the future. Born under a mild government, living in the midst of an enlightened society, where the memory of factions was far distant, and the despotism that repressed them was no longer present, or, at any rate, not felt, he lightly adjusted humanity to his desire. He forgot what Richelieu had known, and what he had had to do, and Louis XIV also, at the beginning of his reign. He had need, as I said before, of a revolution (were it only such a Fronde as Pascal saw) to refresh his idea of the reality of human nature, that idea which is so easily covered up in calm and civilised epochs.

Machiavelli, on the contrary (let us not forget this in a comparison of the two geniuses), lived at an epoch and in a country where there were daily, for individ-

uals as well as for cities, thirty ways of being destroyed and of perishing. Such a state of society naturally keeps men on the alert, and gives prudence to all.

I return to the *Considérations,* from which I have wandered. Divided between the old Romans of the resistance and the Roman who first passed the Rubicon, Montesquieu does not understand Cæsar to the same degree that he understands other great men; he follows him with a sort of regret. Montesquieu had so lived in idea among those old Romans, that he had an opinion upon them, a direct, personal impression, which he produces sometimes in quite a naïve manner. Speaking of the triumvir Lepidus, sacrificed by Octavius: "We are very glad," he exclaims, "to see the humiliation of this Lepidus. He was the most wicked citizen in the Republic."—*We are very glad:* Montesquieu, when writing, lets many of these familiar expressions escape him, showing his intimacy with his great subjects; there is something abrupt and unexpected, like his own conversation, in these chapters. He says of Alexander: "Let us talk about him at our ease." Elsewhere he says: "I request the reader to pay a little attention"—I see in this the sort of gesture of an eager man who is full of his subject, who fears in talking to let something escape him, and so grasps the arm of his listener.

Sometimes the gesture is grander, less familiar; the orator rises: "Here we must give ourselves the

spectacle of things human" . . . and he goes on to enumerate in a manner worthy of Bossuet all that labour of the Roman people and their Senate—the wars undertaken, the blood shed, so many triumphs, so much wisdom and courage, all to serve finally "to glut the happiness of five or six monsters." The whole passage is pure Bossuet.

There is a main point, nevertheless, on which Montesquieu differed from Bossuet. Both believed in a sovereign counsel in human things; but Bossuet assigns that counsel to God and Providence, who has His secret purpose and object. Montesquieu assigns it elsewhere:

"It is not," he says, "fortune that rules the world; we can ask the Romans, who had a continual succession of prosperity so long as they governed themselves on a certain plan, and an uninterrupted succession of reverses when they conducted themselves on another plan. There are general causes, whether moral or physical, which act in each monarchy, raising it, maintaining it, or flinging it down. All events are subject to these causes; and, though the chances of a battle, which is a particular cause, may have ruined a State, there was a general cause, which brought about that this State should perish by a single battle. In a word: the main procedure sweeps along with it all special incidents."

Montesquieu's whole philosophy of history lies in those words; and we must agree that in what concerns the Romans, judging things after the event, he seems to be right. The Romans certainly do lend themselves wonderfully to the application of this linked system: we might even say, in truth, that they came

into the world expressly that Montesquieu might "consider" them.

And yet, even if we do not assign directly to Providence itself, as Bossuet does, the counsel and law of the world of history, it seems to me very difficult and very perilous to find it in this succession and linking together of events in which Montesquieu flatters himself he has discovered it. Machiavelli, on this point, seems to me wiser and nearer the truth than Montesquieu when he reminds us, even in the midst of his reflections, how much of chance—that is, of causes to us unknown—there is in the origin and in the accomplishment of the facts of history and the life of empires. Here, again, Montesquieu suffers from living in his study and never seeing history make itself before him. Otherwise, he would oftener have said to himself: "On what small things do great things hinge!" Cardinal Alberoni is reported to have made a criticism of this kind upon him: "There is temerity," he said, "in seeking for the causes of the grandeur and decadence of the Romans in the Constitution of their State. Events in which human wisdom had the smallest part make epochs rather than consequences."

Montesquieu was sixty years of age when he published his *Esprit des Lois* (end of 1748). During the preceding years, when he was not at his château of La Brède, he lived in Paris, where he was much in the great world, especially in the circle of the Duchesse d'Aiguillon and of Mme. du Deffand, and was greatly

desired everywhere; a simple, kindly man, never seeking to shine. "I had the good fortune to frequent the same companies that he did," says Maupertuis; "I have seen and shared in the eagerness with which he was always awaited, and the joy with which we saw him arrive." "Who would not love this man," wrote the Chevalier d'Aydie to Mme. du Deffand, "this good man, this great man, original in his works, in his nature, in his manners, and always worthy of admiration, or else adorable." A contemporary of Montesquieu, whom I scarcely dare quote in connection with him, the frivolous Abbé de Voisenon, gives, nevertheless, a few pleasant anecdotes of him, and tells them well:

"He was such a good father," he says, "that he really believed in good faith that his son was worth more than he. He was a kind and firm friend; his conversation was varied, like his writings. He had both gaiety and reflection; he knew how to argue and at the same time he conversed well. He was extremely absent-minded; he started one day from Fontainebleau, telling his carriage to follow, so that he might go on foot for an hour, to get some exercise; he went as far as Villejuif, supposing he was not yet at Chailly (a distance of 48 kilometres)."

Garat, in his life of Suard, shows us Montesquieu in his domain of La Brède:

"among the lawns, the fountains, the woods, laid out in the English fashion, walking about from morning till night, a white cotton cap upon his head and a vine-prop over his shoulder. Persons who came to present to him the homage of Europe have been known to ask him more than once, taking him for a vine-dresser, if that were Montesquieu's château."

The Marquis d'Argenson, who judges him very truly, says:

"As he has immense intelligence he makes a charming use of what he knows; but he puts more intellect into his books than into his conversation, because he does not seek to shine and will not take the trouble to do so. He keeps the Gascon accent which he brought from his native region, and thinks it in some way beneath him to correct it. He takes no care of his style, which is much wittier and sometimes more vigorous than it is pure."

Speaking of the great work that Montesquieu had had in preparation for twenty years, M. d'Argenson goes on to say:

"I know some portions of it, which can only sustain the reputation of the author; but I foresee that, as a whole, it may fail, and that we shall find more agreeable single chapters to read, more clever and seductive ideas, than really true and useful instruction on the way that laws should be drawn up and put in force. . . . I know the author to have all possible intelligence; he has acquired vast knowledge, during his travels and also during his retirement in the country; but I again predict that he will not give us the book we are needing; although we shall surely find in the one he is preparing many profound ideas, new thoughts, striking images, sallies of wit and genius, and a multitude of curious facts—the collecting of which supposes even more taste than study."

M. d'Argenson was not mistaken in one direction, but much mistaken in another. Montesquieu's book, with all its defects, was destined to quell the fears and surpass the hopes of his friends. There are works at which we must not look too closely; they stand as monuments. Mme. du Deffand's remark, *"Ce n'est pas l'Esprit des Lois, c'est de l'esprit sur les lois"* ["It is not the Spirit of the Laws, it is wit and humour, about

the laws"], is a saying which might be true in the private society of Montesquieu, but ceases to be so from the point of view of the public and of the world. The public sees things more as a whole, and when there is a breath from above and a lofty imprint on a work it takes for granted that the author is right on all points, and yields to its influence.

It was of this same *Esprit des Lois* that the studious Gibbon said, speaking of his studies: "I read Grotius and Puffendorf; I read Barbeyrac; I read Locke and his treatises; but my delight is to read and reread Montesquieu, whose vigour of style and boldness of hypothesis are so potent to rouse and stimulate the genius of the age." And Horace Walpole, speaking of the work on its appearance, wrote: "I consider it the best book that was ever written—at least I never learned half as much from all the books I ever read. There is as much wit in it as there is practical knowledge." This last point has become doubtful in the present day. "There is no book," says, on the contrary, a recent English critic, "that can be cited as having done more for the human race at the time when it appeared, and from which a reader in these days can draw so few practical ideas." But that is the fate of nearly every work that has made the human mind progress.

Montesquieu, at the period of its publication, appears to us, in his correspondence, in all the suffering and extreme fatigue of childbirth. He had spent

the three preceding years on his estate (1743–1746), working without intermission. His eyes gave out; he saw but little; his better eye was afflicted with cataract. His secretary and his daughter read to him, for he could no longer read for himself. "I am crushed down by weariness," he wrote (March 31, 1747); "I hope to rest for the remainder of my days." The idea of adding to his work a digression on the origin and revolutions of civil Laws in France (which forms the last four volumes of the *Esprit des Lois*), came to him only toward the last. "I thought I should kill myself these three months," he said (March, 1748), "trying to finish a piece I wished to add, which will be a book on the origin and revolutions of our civil Laws in France. It will take three hours to read; but I assure you it has cost me such labour that my hair is whitened by it." The book finished, and published in Geneva, he cries out: "But I confess the work has nearly killed me; I shall rest; I shall toil no more."

Something of this effort, thus vividly described, has crept into his work. The first book, which treats of laws in general, taking them in their broadest acceptation and in relation to all beings in the universe, is very vague; and, if I may dare to say so, we feel in the first book an embarrassed man, just as we feel a wearied and rather breathless man in the last. At the head of his second volume (that is, half-way, the edition of Geneva being printed in two volumes), he

intended to place an "Invocation to the Muses" in the classic style:

"O Virgins of Mount Pierus! list to the name I give you! Inspire me! I have run a long course; I am crushed beneath sadness and weariness. Put into my spirit the charm and the sweetness I felt in other days, which desert me now. Never are you so divine as when you lead wisdom and truth by pleasurable ways.

"But, if you will not soften the rigour of my toil, hide the toil itself! Let men be taught, and I not teach! Let me reflect, let me feel, and then, when I proclaim new things, make men believe that I knew nothing; that it was you who told me all . . . ."

The whole "Invocation" is full of beauty; and the sentiment of the delights of reason, which is defined as "the most perfect, the most noble, the most exquisite of our senses," rises into poesy. The friend in Geneva, who was charged with printing the work and of revising the proofs, objected to this hymn as being too antique for a modern work, and begged leave to suppress it; which request Montesquieu, after some opposition, granted.

No one will expect me to assume the airs of a critic in speaking of the *Esprit des Lois:* many volumes would be needed for such criticism, and the work would have to be taken book by book, chapter by chapter. I know three attempts of this kind: that of M. de Tracy, which, in spite of its title, is a logical refutation, or rectification, rather than a *Commentaire;* that of the farmer-general Dupin, which is not to be despised; and I have seen still a third refutation in manuscript, written by Cardinal de Boisgelin, former

Archbishop of Aix. Montesquieu can be stopped at every step on his general divisions of government, on the principle he assigns to each of them, on climates and the influence he attributes to them, on the quotations with which he strews his work. It often happens that he quotes incorrectly and for effect, as Chateaubriand has done later; that happens to men of imagination who make use of erudition without binding themselves down to it or mastering it. They take note, as they read, of witty or salient passages, and later, when composing, they take infinite pains to turn their royal road past their illustrative note, which may sometimes be merely a lively anecdote. Montesquieu makes too much use of classic incidents and the petty equivocal examples they afford him. What is it to us, I ask, how Arribas, King of the Molossians, modified an absolute government? Why should we know whether such or such police measures were adopted by the Epidamnians, and what conclusions could we reasonably draw from them?

The frequent breaks in the *Esprit des Lois,* the cutting up into chapters—composed, sometimes, of a single sentence—also show either a certain hesitation in arrangement, or a certain pretension to authority. Buffon, himself the very opposite to this style of writing, explained it in Montesquieu by physical causes: "The president," he said, "was nearly blind, and he was so eager, that half the time he forgot what he wanted to dictate, so that he was obliged in the end

to restrict himself to the smallest possible space." Montesquieu himself states that if, when talking, he felt he was simply listened to, the whole subject seemed to vanish from before him. He needed an interlocutor to keep him going. "As for conversations of reasoning," he continued, "where the subjects are argued, give and take, back and forth, I get on pretty well." The *Esprit des Lois* gives us very often the "cut and thrust" [*coupé et recoupé*] of which Montesquieu speaks. All said, however, the book remains a work of genius; chapters like those on Alexander and on Charlemagne compensate us for everything; chapters like those on the Constitution and, especially, on the political morals of England (book xix., ch. 27), are discoveries in the world of history. We feel at every turn in Montesquieu one of those rapid, penetrating minds which are the first to stir a mass, and then enlighten it.

I have stated the radical defect that I believe is in Montesquieu's statesmanship: he puts the average of humanity, considered in its natural data, rather higher than it is. It is not ill that a legislator should impel men, even by means of a little illusion, to the use of all their faculties and all their virtue; but he ought to know under what inward conditions that is possible, and take his precautions in consequence. Montesquieu not only does not acquaint his reader with this, he does not acquaint himself. In picturing the government of England as so noble (which he had, never-

theless, seen closely with all its shadows), he seems never to have asked himself what effect his pictures might have in France. He certainly did not wish for the ruin of the monarchy, even that of Louis XV; he considered it tempered by the parliaments, and reformable in itself: "I have not, by nature," he said, "a disapproving spirit"; and he was far indeed from having a revolutionary one. Very different from Jean-Jacques, he desired that every man, after reading him, should have "new reasons to love his duty, his prince, his country, and the laws"; and yet he shows nowhere the slightest anxiety as to the result of the comparison he presents to the imagination of his compatriots. In the *Esprit des Lois,* Montesquieu seems to forget that Frenchmen remain what he saw and described them to be in the *Lettres Persanes;* and, though he speaks continually, with virtuous conviction, of moderate government, he does not sufficiently tell himself under his breath that such moderation is not one of the qualities that can be transplanted.

No doubt a certain chapter can be quoted in which he warns the French legislator that he must not correct too much, and that he must be careful not to change the general spirit of the nation (book xix., ch. 5); he compares the French and the Athenians, and makes it understood that Frenchmen, with all their good qualities and all their defects, ought to remain what they are. But here, again, Montesquieu is like

a certain Athenian, who, unintentionally, spoke so highly of the Lacedæmonians that afterwards he cried in vain to his compatriots, "Do not imitate them!" they all rushed in rivalry to the ways of Lycurgus.

Being Frenchmen, when we have read much of Montesquieu, temptation seizes us:

"He seems," says a sagacious critic, M. Joubert, "to teach the art of making empires; we think we are learning it as we listen to him; and every time we read him, we are tempted to construct one. Montesquieu does not sufficiently tell his readers: 'You are not statesmen enough, neither am I, to consider history with any such reflection, or to reason on it so easily and loftily'—The first and last word of the *Esprit des Lois* ought to be:—Statesmanship cannot be taught by books."

That we all—minds which form the commonalty of the world—should fall into such errors from which we are freed in after years by experience, is natural and simple,—nothing more so; but that the legislator and the genius who arises as our guide should, to a certain point, fall into the same errors and seem not to suspect that they can be fallen into, *there* is the weak side, and a sort of imprudence. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who feared no revolution, might be bold and foolhardy; but Montesquieu, who does not desire one, was he sufficiently foresighted?

Let us take the *Esprit des Lois* for what it is: a work of thought and civilisation. What is finest in it is the man behind the book. We must not ask of that book more method, more continuity, more precision, and more practicality in detail, more sobriety in

imagination and in erudition, more practical counsels than are actually in it; we should see the characteristics of moderation, patriotism, and humanity that the writer wrought into all his noble words and into many of his magnanimous utterances. It is in this sense that he has reason to speak of the "majesty" of his topic, and to add: "I do not think I have totally lacked genius." Everywhere, and in those noble portions so often quoted, we feel the man who desires true liberty, the true virtue of the citizen; things of which he had seen no perfect pattern among moderns, the idea of which he had formed for himself in his study and before the busts of the ancients.

The *Esprit des Lois* is a book which now is of no other use than that noble, perpetual use of carrying the mind into high historic regions, and giving birth to a vast array of fine discussions. In the order and practice of free and moderate governments men will continue to find in it general inspiration and memorable texts. As for its oracles, those who want them may seek them. The circle of things human, which has so many turns and twists, and of which we can never say that it is closed for ever, seems many a time to have given both right and wrong to Montesquieu. Very clever and very confident would he be who could see the confirmation of any certain order announced by him, and not eternal vicissitude.

The great work was scarcely published before it excited clamours which were only the signal of the

revolution it was about to produce in ideas. At first, its success was decided solely among the *élite* of minds. "I hear," said the illustrious author, "a few hornets buzzing around me; but if the bees only gather a little honey that suffices me." Montesquieu lived six years longer; he was old before his time. He said one day to young Suard and others who were listening: "I am at an end; I have fired all my cartridges; all my candles are burnt out." About the same time, he wrote this melancholy yet serene and lofty thought: "I had conceived the design of giving greater breadth and depth to certain portions of my *Esprit,* but I have become incapable; my eyes are weakened by reading, and it seems to me that all that remains for me of light is the dawn of the day when they will close for ever."

We are able to form some idea of Montesquieu's conversation. In a *Defense* which he deigned to make of the *Esprit des Lois,* in reply to a Jansenist Gazette (for he was very sensitive to criticism), there is, towards the end, a very lively page which, according to d'Alembert, represents fairly well what he was as a conversationalist. His manner of talking was eager, rapid, abrupt, and full of metaphor. Marmontel remarks that he always "waited till the ball came to him, when he took it on the bound; he was naturally witty." Speaking in the *Defense* of narrow-minded critics who attacked a great work by School sophistries and sect scruples, Montesquieu adds:

"That style of criticism is the one thing in the world most capable of limiting the extent and diminishing the sum of national genius. . . . Nothing stifles knowledge more than to put upon all things a professor's robe. . . You cannot have your mind occupied in speaking well when you are terrified by the fear of speaking ill. . . . Such critics come and clap a child's cap on our heads, and tell us at each word we utter: 'Take care, now; you want to speak your way, but I choose you to speak like me.' . . . Just as we begin to soar they pull us by the sleeve. Have we life and vigour?—they will take them away with pin-pricks. . . . Are we rising to any height? here come those men with their foot-rule or their tape-line, calling out to us to come down that they may take our measure."

Add to this picture a slight Gascon accent, and you might think it was Montesquieu himself who was speaking. Sometimes, in his rolling fire of imagery we fancy that we are reading Montaigne.

"His modest, free demeanour," says a contemporary of Montesquieu (Maupertuis) "is like his conversation. His figure is well proportioned. Though he has lost the sight of one eye almost entirely, and the other is very weak, no one would perceive it; the expression of his countenance unites sweetness and sublimity." His long, thin, refined face was a type of the region where he was born, the Bordeaux type; his well-cut profile had a noble aspect, and seemed made to stamp a medal.

In society, Montesquieu did not allow himself to yield to coteries that inclined to be imperious; we have the judgments upon him of Mme. Geoffrin and the Duchesse de Chaulnes, that is to say, of two women who liked to get much out of those who sur-

rounded them and to play with them as they pleased. Mme. Geoffrin paints Montesquieu as an absent-minded man, "not knowing the names of his servants, and having a carriage that makes as much noise as a hackney-coach, etc." Mme. de Chaulnes says: "That man came into society to make a book; he remembered all that was told to him; he spoke to no strangers unless he thought he could get something useful out of them." She says elsewhere: "What is he good for, that genius?" Montesquieu answers both when he says in his *Pensées:* "I like the houses where I can get along with my every-day intellect." That is for the Duchesse de Chaulnes. And here is for Mme. Geoffrin: "I am not sorry to pass for absent-minded; it enables me to risk many negligences which might have embarrassed me."

This superior spirit which, without his intending it, gave birth or pretext to a number of demi-Montesquieus both supercilious and self-sufficient, was in him modesty itself:

"Modest men," he exclaims in the *Lettres Persanes,* "come, that I may embrace you! you make the sweetness and charm of life. You think you have nothing, and I tell you you have all. You think you humiliate no one, and you humiliate every one. When I compare you in my mind with the arbitrary men I see everywhere, I fling them from their tribune and lay them at your feet."

He had the kind-heartedness to think that he had neglected to make the fortune of his family and the glory of the name. "I confess," he said, "that I have

too much vanity to wish that my children should one day make themselves a great fortune; it would only be by force of reason that they could then support the idea of me; they would need all their virtue to own me." He thought, for example, that if one of his sons became minister, chancellor, or something of that kind, it would be an embarrassment to so important a personage to have a father or grandfather like him, who had made nothing but books. This is certainly an excess of modesty, or a remains of class prejudice which is difficult to comprehend.

Montesquieu died at Havre, February 10, 1755. The circumstances of his death, and the obsessions that accompanied it have often been related. What is less known is that his funeral was attended by almost no one. Diderot (so Grimm tells us) was the only man of Letters who followed him to the grave. The eighteenth century army of men of Letters which was soon to march as one man with unanimity and proselytising zeal, and to give itself a final rendezvous at the funeral of Buffon (April, 1788), was not yet enrolled, nor even astir when Montesquieu died.

Adrienne Le Couvreur.

Adrienne Le Couvreur.

THERE are names that live, and of which we speak at any moment as of something present. Utter the name of Heloise, of La Vallière, every one knows them, and yet is glad to hear them spoken of again. We desire, we hope to learn something more about them. Brilliancy, romance, a destiny of ardour, devotion, and tenderness, of pathetic misfortune,—all this attaches to these poetic figures, and, transmitted and consecrated, procures for them in the imagination of the ages a perpetual youth. A sort of legend forms around them that never dies out. If we knew where their graves were, we would gladly go each year piously to lay fresh wreaths upon them.

Somewhat similar is the case of Adrienne Le Couvreur. The reasons for this are confused; I shall try here to disentangle a few of them. She was the first actress in France who was renowned on the stage, and, at the same time, received with consideration in society. She was loved by the greatest soldier of his time; she inspired the greatest poet of the day with his most pathetic elegy. The public scandal caused by

the refusal of sepulture to her body, the tragic explanation and frightful suspicion that attended her death, have, one and all, cast a mysterious interest over her fate, and made her a victim whom we feel disposed both to love and avenge. What further shall I say? She is of those who, living, had *charm;* and (what is given to very few) the mysterious essence of that charm survives; it continues to operate in her memory.

I have lately witnessed the drama, full of action, in which two men of talent, Scribe and Legouvé (one of them the most skilful dramatic engineer of our age), have reconstructed and brought into play that memory. They have conceived the rôle from the point of view of a great actress, the Adrienne of our day [Rachel], suiting it to her by many happy touches. Nevertheless, this would not be a sufficient reason for me to meddle in matters belonging to the stage, and to encroach upon a domain which is not mine, if I had not been informed of new documents, original writings, relating to the affair of the poisoning, and also of certain unpublished letters that do honour to this woman, as remarkable for her mind and her integrity as for her talent. One of my friends, an ardent bibliophile of choice tastes, feeling, in respect to Mlle. Le Couvreur, that indefinable charm of which I have spoken, determined to make careful search for all that could be further learned of her, and, as he is lucky, he found enough to add, on several points, to what was

ADRIENNE LE COUVREUR.

From an old painting.

known already. While awaiting this coming publication, which M. Ravenel is preparing, I feel myself permitted to pause for an instant on this subject of Adrienne Le Couvreur, as not inappropriate at the present moment.

Adrienne was born about the year 1690, at Fismes, between Soissons and Reims. Her father, a hatter by trade, moved his family to Paris in 1702, and lodged in the faubourg St.-Germain, not far from the Comédie Française. This neighbourhood offered the child opportunities to strengthen a passion for the theatre that was born in her: "Many of the bourgeois of Fismes," relates the Abbé d'Allainval, whom I cannot help quoting for these beginnings of her career, "told me that, from childhood, she took pleasure in reciting verses, and that they often enticed her into their houses to listen to her. The Demoiselle Le Couvreur was one of those extraordinary persons who are self-made." When she was fifteen, she arranged with some young people of the neighbourhood to act *Polyeucte* and the little comedy of *Deuil* by Thomas Corneille. These performances took place at a grocery in the rue Férou. They were talked of in the quarter. Adrienne played Pauline, and was not ill seconded by her comrades; one of them distinguished himself by the truth of his acting. Mme. Le Jay lent the little troop her house, rue Garancière; society rushed thither; it is said that the doors, guarded by eight Swiss, were forced in. The tragedy was

scarcely over when the police entered and forbade the performance. The afterpiece was not acted.

Thus ended these unlicensed performances. Adrienne played some time longer within the precincts of the Temple, under the protection of the grand prior of Vendôme; we know that she took lessons from the comedian Le Grand; after that, we lose sight of her. She travelled about the provinces and their adjoining countries, acting in the theatres of Lorraine and Alsace. She must have returned more than once to Paris, but she did not appear there in public till the spring of 1717, when she made her début in the rôles of Monime and Electra; from that first day she proved herself an accomplished actress. It was loudly declared that she began where other great actresses ended. She was then about twenty-five years old, and continued on the stage for thirteen years longer.

In an art that leaves behind it so few traces, it is difficult, when judging from the distance of years to do more than repeat the testimony of contemporaries, which we have almost no means of verifying. In this case, praises were unanimous, all agreeing on the same points: "To her is given the glory," said *Le Mercure,* March, 1730, "of having introduced simple, noble, natural declamation, and of having discarded sing-song." She also sought more truth and correctness in costumes; she was the first, for instance, to bring into use court dresses in the parts of queen and princesses. She made this innovation when playing

Queen Elizabeth in the *Comte d'Essex*. In assuming the queen's dress, she also assumed her tone—that is, she spoke the part naturally, without ostentation, without feeling herself obliged, like other actresses, to make up for what was, until then, lacking in the costume by an affected solemnity. The audience seemed to see "a princess acting for her pleasure." She also played comedy, properly so-called, but with less freedom and resourcefulness: she never shone except in a few comic parts. Her true domain, her incomparable glory was in pathos. "She had the art of entering into the greatest passions to the degree necessary to express them and make them felt in full force."

It was said of Mlle. Champmeslé that she had so sonorous a voice that if, when she declaimed, a door were opened at the farther end of the theatre, she could be heard in the Café Procope. I doubt if this would have been the case with Mlle. Le Couvreur, but her voice was penetrating, true in tone, and subtle; she sustained weak verses, and gave their full value to the finest. "She had not many tones in her voice, but she knew how to vary them to infinity, adding inflexions, some vehemence, and I know not what that was expressive in her air, her face, and all her person, which left nothing to be desired." She excelled in gradation, in the passing from one tone to another, which so fully expresses the vicissitudes of passion. The memory still lasts of certain passages

in her rôles of Berenice, Elizabeth, Electra, in which she moved all hearts by these contrasted and affecting tones. No one ever understood so well the art of mute scenes, the art of listening well, and of continuing to act with her person and her expressive attitude while others spoke.

It does not appear that, off the stage, her beauty was very striking or extraordinary; but she had natural elegance and harmony. We know her portrait by Coypel, who painted her in mourning garments, holding her urn as Cornélie. *Le Mercure* shows her far more as she was naturally,

"perfectly well made, of medium height, with a noble and composed bearing; the head and shoulders well placed, the eyes full of fire, the mouth beautiful, the nose slightly aquiline, with much charm in her air and in her manners; no *embonpoint,* but the cheeks rather full, and with features all well fitted to express grief, joy, tenderness, terror, and pity."

Much soul, much tender feeling, constant study, a passionate love for her art, all contributed to make her that ideal of a great tragedian which, until then, seems never to have been fully realised. Mlle. Duclos was the representative of the declamatory school only; and though Mlle. Desmares and the Champmeslé had great and noble qualities, they certainly never attained to the full perfection of Adrienne Le Couvreur. When the latter came she had no other model than her own taste; she created.

In the various arts, but especially in that of the

stage, there have been, at all times, two manners opposing each other; the manner of the official school (Conservatoire or Academy), and that of original talent —the manner that declaims or chants, and that which speaks. We find these two schools already in opposition and at war at the dawn of our stage; the troop of Molière against that of the Hôtel de Bourgogne. Remember the *Impromptu de Versailles,* in which this conflict is so well defined. Molière wished, even in tragedy, that the parts should be spoken naturally, *humanly;* the difficulty lay in harmonising perfect dignity and nobleness with this naturalness, which on the stage can be only a cultivated and conscious naturalness. Molière, when acting, succeeded imperfectly in doing this in tragic parts, for which nature had not fitted him. Baron, his pupil, formed wholly by his teaching, put those lessons into practice. Mlle. Le Couvreur had seen Baron when, old but still excellent, he returned to the stage in 1720; but she had not awaited that sight to realise, in her own way, Molière's poetic idea, and to unite in herself the lofty, pathetic, and natural qualities of a great tragic actress.

It is related that when she first appeared in Paris and was received with eager applause, a man, seated alone in the corner of a box, was not carried away by the universal enthusiasm, but merely said from time to time, at a few points: "That is good, *that,*" as if he meant it to be understood that the rest was not

equally good. This incident was told to the actress, who desired to know the recalcitrant auditor, and invited him, in a charming note, to dine alone with her. The man was Du Marsais, the philosopher and grammarian, a simple, naïve man, little accustomed to society, frank, and inexorably accurate. Before sitting down at table, he asked Mlle. Le Couvreur to recite a few pieces; as he listened to her in attentive silence, he ejaculated now and then: "That is good, that." Urged to give the reasons for his criticism, he made no difficulty about telling them; and a long friendship ensued, in the course of which the modest philosopher spared no useful advice; advice which related to truth, naturalness, and propriety of expression. He desired that no more value should be given to words than was required by the situation. Such counsel found in Mlle. Le Couvreur's honest intelligence a ground prepared for it.

This relation of Du Marsais to Mlle. Le Couvreur is partly that which the authors of the new play ascribe to Michonnet; and this reminds me that the actor who plays that part so admirably, M. Regnier, is preparing for publication a study on the talent and dramatic invention of Mlle. Le Couvreur. I shall therefore not dwell upon them here. Michonnet's part is a double one: he is a true, sincere, disinterested counsellor, as Du Marsais was in real life; but he is, besides, the lover, equally true, sincere, devoted to the point of sacrifice; and that half of the rôle we find

no less filled by another friend of Mlle. Le Couvreur, M. d'Argental.

Mlle. Le Couvreur, in her early youth, had many adorers, of whom we have the right to name a few, Voltaire, for instance. Speaking to Thieriot of the touching verses forced from him by his indignation over the burial of the celebrated actress, Voltaire says that his anger, too keen perhaps, is "pardonable in a man who was her admirer, her friend, her lover, and who is, besides, a poet." This is sufficiently clear. Mlle. Le Couvreur had two daughters who survived her. One, born in Strasburg, daughter of M. Kinglin, at that time chief magistrate or, as they say there, prætor of that city; she is often mentioned in Voltaire's letters. The other daughter was born in Paris, and was baptised at Saint-Eustache, September 7, 1710, as the "daughter of Philippe Le Roy, officer of Monseigneur le Duc de Lorraine, and Adrienne Le Couvreur"; she married, in 1730, Francœur, musician at the Opera. The learned mathematician, of that name, was of this family.

But the great passion of Mlle. Le Couvreur, that which put an end to the levities of her early life, was her love for the Comte de Saxe, who came to Paris for the first time in 1720, and fixed his residence there in 1722. From the moment when she first loved him, and in spite of his infidelities, which he never denied himself, it is plain that Mlle. Le Couvreur never afterwards considered herself free. Passionately beloved

by young d'Argental, she did all she could to cure him. She did not take half-measures, which are more fitted to excite and allure that which they are supposed to repel; her action was straightforward, loyal, without *arrière-pensée;* it was that of an honest man. She wrote to him:

"You wish, against all sorts of reasons, that I should write to you. How is it that with so much intelligence you are so little master of yourself? What can you gain but the pleasure of exposing me to disagreeable annoyances, not to say worse? I am ashamed to quarrel with you when you fill me with pity, but you compel me to do so. Be, I beg of you, more reasonable; and say to him whom you have commissioned to torment me, that he must give me a respite; for the last four days he has hardly left me in peace for a moment. I will show you clearly the impropriety of this conduct the first time that accident brings us together, and I shall have no difficulty in making you agree that you do wrong. Adieu, unhappy child—you fill me with despair."

Hearing that d'Argental's mother, Mme. de Ferriol, thought of sending her son away even as far as St. Domingo, for fear that he might be induced to make her an offer of marriage, Mlle. Le Couvreur attempted to reassure her. She went to see Mme. de Ferriol, and as the reception she met with did not encourage her to speak freely, she wrote her a letter, noble in tone, admirable in feeling, the letter of a woman who seeks to reconcile natural duties with the conventions of social life. In writing this letter, dictated by her heart, she did not suspect the moral height on which it placed her; that height is great, especially when we

think of the sort of woman (worthy sister of Mme. de Tencin, and that is enough to say) to whom it is addressed:

(Paris, March 22, 1721). "Madame, I cannot hear without being keenly grieved, of the uneasiness that you feel, and the plans which that uneasiness has caused you to form. I might add that I have no less pain in hearing that you blame my conduct. But I write to you less to justify that conduct than to assure you that in future it will be, in the matter that interests you, whatever you may prescribe to me. On Tuesday last I asked permission to see you, that I might speak with you in private and ask your orders. Your greeting destroyed my zeal, and I found I had nothing left but timidity and sadness. It is necessary that you should know my true sentiments, and, if I may be permitted to say something further, that you should not disdain to listen to my very humble remonstrances if you do not wish to injure Monsieur your son. He is the most respectful child and the most honest man I have ever seen in my life. You would admire him, if he did not belong to you. Once more, madame, deign to join with me in destroying a weakness which irritates you, and of which I am not the accomplice, whatever you may think. Do not show him either contempt or bitterness; I would rather take upon myself all his hatred, in spite of the tender friendship and reverence that I feel for him, than expose him to the slightest temptation to displease you. You are too interested in his cure not to work for it anxiously, but you are too much so to succeed alone, and, above all, by combating his inclination with authority, and by painting me to him in disadvantageous colours, however true they may be. Surely this passion is extraordinary, since it has lasted so long a time without the slightest hope, in the midst of rebuffs, and in spite of the journeys you have made him undertake and of eight months in Paris without seeing me, and without knowing whether I would ever receive him again in my life. I believed him cured; and in that belief I consented to see him during my late illness. It is easy to believe that his friendship would please me better than this unhappy passion, which surprises as much as it flatters me, but of which I do not wish to take advantage. You fear that in seeing me he will neglect his duties; and you carry that fear so far as to take these violent resolutions against him. In truth, madame, it is not right that he should be made unhappy in so many ways. Do not add to

my unkindnesses to him; seek rather to compensate him for them; let all your resentment fall upon me, and let your kindness give him compensation.

"I will write to him whatever you wish; I will never see him again if you desire it; but do not threaten to send him to the end of the world. He can be useful to his country; he can be the delight of his friends; he will crown you with satisfaction and fame; you have only to guide his talents, and let his virtues act. Forget for a time that you are his mother, if that quality is opposed to the kindness that I ask you on my knees to give him. In short, madame, you will see me retire from the world, or love him with love, rather than suffer him in future to be tormented about me, and by me."

M. d'Argental had no knowledge of this letter at the time it was written. It was not until sixty years later, when he was over eighty, that one day, looking over some old papers relating to his mother, he found it. It was read to him, and then, for the first time, did he truly know the heart of his early love.

Mlle. Le Couvreur, as everything we know of her proves to us, was not only a person of talent, she was a woman distinguished by intellect, by heart, and by all the solid qualities. She had need of them to raise her from the inferior social position in which actresses were still held at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Molière, by force of genius and wit, Baron by his talent aided by his self-conceit, had raised the profession of actors in the social world, in which they now maintained themselves on a footing of respectability. But the women, even those of talent like the Champmeslé, had never been able to win any degree of consideration; they remained in the very lowest position socially. People went to the Champmeslé's

house; they lauded her in gallant verses, like those of La Fontaine; they lived with her on familiar terms, but she had nothing that could be called a salon. She never succeeded in gaining that social esteem which is marked by such nicety of shade, the esteem that Ninon secured. Racine, the tender and once lover-like Racine, speaks of Champmeslé, on hearing of her death, as "that poor unfortunate," in a tone that the most austere devotion would not have dictated to any honourable man of the world in after years. The century that was soon to be that of Voltaire did not long permit such inequalities among the different interpreters of art, and Mlle. Le Couvreur was the first, not to protest but (what was far better) gently to work a revolution by the charm of her influence.

She had much to do, as we can well believe. An actress was at the beck and call of the whole privileged class. It was in speaking to Mlle. Le Couvreur that Lord Peterborough said: "Come! show me much love and much wit." What he said crudely, like the queer original that he was, many others felt they had the right to think, if they had the politeness not to say it. By intelligence, good sense, a sentiment of propriety and modesty, Mlle. Le Couvreur obtained a position in society which, at that epoch, no other actress had any right to claim. She was the first to win for actresses in France the position of Ninon; that is to say, the position, as a woman, of an honourable

man, receiving the best company of men, and even of women, when the latter were prompted by curiosity and possessed a little courage. "It is an established fashion to dine or sup with me," she writes, "because it has pleased a few duchesses to do me that honour." That honour had its burdens, and entailed subjection, as she herself wrote:

"If my poor health, which is feeble, as you know, causes me to refuse or miss a party of ladies whom I should otherwise have met, but who only think of me out of curiosity, or, if I may dare to say so, out of vogue (which enters into everything), one says: 'Just see how she affects importance.' Another adds: 'It is because we are not titled!' If I am serious, for one cannot always be gay among a quantity of people whom one scarcely knows, they say: 'So that is the woman who has so much intellect! Don't you see how she disdains us; we ought to know Greek to satisfy her.' 'She goes to Mme. Lambert's,' says another; 'does n't that solve the enigma for you?'"

Mme. de Lambert was the friend of Fontenelle, of La Motte, and of Mairan. People accused her of keeping an office for intellect, because her house was "nearly the only one," says Fontenelle, "that was preserved from the epidemic disease of card-playing; the only one where persons could meet to converse together reasonably, and even wittily on occasion."

The salon of Mlle. Le Couvreur was among the few where, on certain days, wit and reason had a chance to meet. She lived in a little house in the rue des Marais-Saint-Germain, in which it was said that Racine had once lived, and which was afterwards occupied by Mlle. Clairon. A considerable fortune

for those times, amounting, some said, to more than three hundred thousand *livres*, gave her an honourable independence. The days on which she was not too much invaded by duchesses and persons of fashion, Mlle. Le Couvreur took pleasure in receiving her friends.

"My vanity," she said, "does not find that great numbers are any compensation for real merit in people. I do not care to shine; I have a hundred times more pleasure in saying nothing and listening to good things; I like better to find myself in a society of wise and virtuous persons than to be made giddy with insipid praises that are showered upon me at random. It is not that I lack gratitude, or the desire to please; but I find that the approbation of a fool is not flattering, except in a general way, and that it becomes a burden when it must be paid for by special and perpetual affability."

So she deprived herself, as much as she could, of the approbation of fools, and clung to that of her friends. These friends, honest men, whom she preferred to all, were Fontenelle, Du Marsais, Voltaire, d'Argental, the Comte de Caylus, the Abbé d'Anfreville, the Comte de Saxe, and certain intimate friends of the latter, such as the Marquis de Rochemore. To these we may add a few clever women, of good social position but not fine ladies overmuch, such as Mme. Berthier, for instance. This I imagine to have been, on certain days, the *personnel* of a supper at Mlle. Le Couvreur's, and there was surely a less well-assorted one in high places. The tone that prevailed in this company could not have resembled that which we see established towards the middle of the century, at the suppers of Mlle.

Quinault. The Memoirs of Mme. d'Épinay make us spectators of the latter. The conversation there is racy, but free to licentiousness, which fact does not prevent it from becoming at times declamatory. That was not the habitual tone of a house where, it is true, Voltaire had free entry and permitted himself, no doubt, his usual sallies, but where Fontenelle was enjoyed and welcomed; it was not the tone of Mlle. Le Couvreur's suppers. She has left us a charming portrait of Fontenelle, which paints herself as fully as it does the philosopher she knew so well how to appreciate.

"Persons of no account," writes Mlle. Le Couvreur, "do too little honour to those of whom they speak for me to dare to say publicly what I think of M. de Fontenelle; but I cannot deny myself the pleasure of privately painting him such as he appears to me.

"His countenance proclaims at once his intellect: an air of society, pervading his whole person, makes him agreeable in all his actions.

"Charms of mind sometimes exclude essential things. Unique in his own line, he also combines all that can make him loved and respected—integrity, uprightness, equity, compose his character. A lively and brilliant imagination, subtle and delicate turns of mind, novel and always happy expressions, are its ornaments. A pure heart, straightforward proceedings, uniform conduct, principle in all things; exacting little, justifying others, seizing always the good, abandoning evil so quickly that one might doubt if he perceived it. Difficult to acquire, but more difficult to lose. Firm in friendship, scrupulous in love; the man of honour is nowhere neglected. Fit for the most delicate occupations, those that delight learned men; modest in his speech, simple in his actions, the superiority of his merit shows itself, but he never makes it felt. . . ."

Here we find that excellent and restrained language which I have, more than once, tried to characterise,

the language of the beginning of the eighteenth century, remarkable especially for its turns of phrase, its clearness, and its accuracy; a language formed on that of Mme. de Maintenon, which all intelligent Frenchwomen—Mme. de Caylus, Mme. de Staal, Mlle. Aïssé—were henceforth to write. The personal taste of Mlle. Le Couvreur comes to light, without her knowledge, in this portrait; we feel what qualities she prized above all others and desired in the men who formed her circle. "Difficult to acquire, more difficult to lose": that is the true motto of friendship; and it is a merit that Mlle. Le Couvreur's noble heart places it far above hasty caprices and passing passions. I find, in one of the unpublished letters written by her to a friend of whose name we are ignorant, words which confirm this sincere and habitual sentiment of her heart. This friend had departed suddenly, without telling her, and without writing to her. She complains, with grace:

"I wish," she writes, "to inform you of my principles. When it is a question of writing to my friends, I never think that I need wit or intellect to reply to them; my heart suffices me for all. I listen to it, then I act; and I have always found it well for me. People take me such as I am, or leave me. All the art I know is that of not throwing myself at their head for whatever sentiments there may be. I seek honesty first even in my slightest intimacies. When the graces are added I know how to feel them, nature having given me an admirable instinct to perceive them. Experience of the world, time, and a little reason have convinced me that great indulgence is necessary n life; but those who need it the least lose nothing with me. I give them, on the spot, all the esteem and admiration that they seem to me to deserve. And when they honour me with some kindness, you

can readily see that gratitude is added to those sentiments, and assuredly I have never been ungrateful. . . ."

While she desires friendship, she rather dreads enthusiasms ; she is always afraid that another sentiment may slip in, and she speaks of it in a tone fitted to convince her friend that she wishes to remain as she is :

"I am," she writes, "of a sex and a profession in which this honourable sentiment is not expected ; it is the only one I desire, the only one that flatters me ; and I dare to think myself worthy of it by the manner in which I feel it; I will even add, by that in which I have inspired it more than once. . . ."

Though at an age when women are still, if they choose, able to appear young, she did not hesitate to speak of advancing years, and what they would bring with them "of attentions and duties which ten years hence friends may have to pay to an *old* friend." She wishes they should consider all that in advance, and grow accustomed to the idea ; she is the first to propose it frankly : "Let us go honestly," she said, "towards friendship." The great preservative that she had against all fresh weakness was that her heart was filled ; she loved ; she trembled for an absent one in the midst of dangers, whose return she was awaiting with impatience :

"A person long expected," she writes, October 23, 1728, "arrives, at last, to-night, and, according to appearances, in pretty good health. A courier has come on before him, because his carriage broke down thirty leagues from Paris. A post-chaise has been sent down, and to-night he will be here."

It is not difficult to imagine who that person thus awaited was : Maurice de Saxe was returning, at that date, from Courlande to Paris.

The last year of Mlle. Le Couvreur's life was disturbed by a strange incident, which gave rise to a rumour of poisoning. I shall try to disentangle the story from the popular tales that were mixed up with it, which can be read in the *Lettres* of Mlle. Aïssé, and in the *Journal* of the lawyer, Barbier. About the month of July, 1729, a little humpbacked man, a painter of miniatures, the Abbé Bouret, son of a treasurer of France at Metz, went twice to the house of Mlle. Le Couvreur, and, not finding her, left a letter in which he said that he had very important things to reveal to her ; and that if she wished to hear them, she had only to come on the morrow to a certain solitary alley in the Luxembourg, which he described ; when there, she would recognise him by three taps he would give on his hat, and she could then hear all. Mlle. Le Couvreur, after taking the advice of friends, went to the place indicated with a companion. There she found the little humpback, who told her in substance, that a Court lady, whose miniature he was painting, had proposed to him to gain access to Mlle. Le Couvreur as a painter, and so give her a philter that would drive the Comte de Saxe from her ; that two masked persons, to whom he was referred for the details of the plan, told him that the drug to be given was not a philter, but a poison ; and with that

object poisoned tablets would be deposited, on a certain day, in a yew-tree in the Tuileries gardens ; that the abbé was to take them from there, and if he gave them to Mlle. Le Couvreur, he should be guaranteed a pension of 600 *livres* and a payment down of 6000 *livres*. The abbé added that he had pretended to consent to everything, and now came to ask what he should do.

Mlle. Le Couvreur did not at first think this story as improbable as it now seems to us. The Comte de Saxe was not faithful by nature, though sincerely attached to Mlle. Le Couvreur. He had tried for some time to make advances to the Duchesse de Bouillon, but without success. He had also taken a fancy to an Opera singer. Mlle. Le Couvreur thought vaguely that she might have something to fear either from the hôtel de Bouillon or from the Opera. The abbé saw her thought, and indicated the hôtel de Bouillon as the quarter whence the danger came. She gave him a second appointment, consulted her friends, and the Comte de Saxe himself. It was decided that the abbé should seem to lend himself to the affair, and take the tablets from the Tuileries. All was done as proposed. The abbé found the tablets, and took them to Mlle. Le Couvreur ; they were then taken to M. Hérault, lieutenant-general of police. The Abbé Bouret was arrested at once, and the tablets were analysed. The analysis, made by Geoffroy, of the Academy of Sciences, showed

nothing decisive. I have before my eyes the *procès-verbal,* dated July 20, 1729. Some of the tablets seemed doubtful; but the quantity was not sufficient, says the chemist, to decide the experiments and base a judgment.

Meantime, the affair became known, and it was openly said in public that the Duchesse de Bouillon had attempted to poison Mlle. Le Couvreur. The Abbé Aunillon du Gué de Launay, a friend of the Bouillons, in Memoirs more interesting than known, which he left behind him, tells us that he was the first to inform the duchess of the odious rumour, in order that she might take steps to refute it. He describes to us in natural language the astonishment and pain she showed at the news. This Duchesse de Bouillon, I may remark in passing, was not the princess of that name, born Sobieska, who appears in the drama of the Théâtre Français, but her young mother-in-law, born in Lorraine. The Duc de Bouillon was at once informed ; and the whole family were roused to indignation. The lieutenant of police was summoned and lectured for not having at once pushed the affair to an end, and for having allowed the Abbé Bouret to go at large. The latter was re-arrested and put in Saint-Lazare. Being questioned, he maintained his statement. Mlle. Le Couvreur, touched by the imprisonment of a man who, though he might have intended to dupe her and insinuate himself into her house, might also have sincerely desired to serve her, wrote a

letter full of dignity and humanity to the lieutenant of police :

"I have talked with him, and made him talk often and for a long time," she said of the young man, "and he always answered connectedly and intelligently. It is not that I wish what he said to be true; I have a hundred times more reason to wish he may be crazy. Ah ! would to God I had only to solicit his pardon ! But if he is innocent, think, monsieur, what an interest I ought to take in his fate, and how cruel this uncertainty is to me. Do not consider my profession or my birth, deign to see my soul, which is sincere and laid bare in this letter. . . ."

Matters remained thus for some months The abbé, still a prisoner in Saint-Lazare, persisted in his statement. The Bouillon family urged, or seemed to urge, an investigation of the affair, when suddenly Mlle. Le Couvreur, whose health had failed very much during the past year, was carried off by violent inflammation of the bowels on Monday, March 20, 1730, after playing Jocaste in *Œdipe* and Hortense in *Le Florentin* three days earlier. This sudden death renewed all the reports of poison; though it was certainly most improbable that persons suspected for several months should have chosen this time to renew their attempt —supposing them capable of so doing. The cause of the death was explained more naturally by a dose of ipecacuanha taken by mistake. We have the *procès-verbal* of the post-mortem examination ; it indicates nothing but a most acute inflammation. Voltaire, who was present, and in whose arms Mlle. Le Couvreur died, says that all the rumours then current

were without foundation ; and his testimony would be decisive did we not know that he was systematically opposed to all ideas of poisoning.

To finish on this obscure and delicate point,—after Mlle. Le Couvreur's death, a retraction of his first statement, and a species of exoneration of the Duchesse de Bouillon, were obtained from the Abbé Bouret, still a prisoner at Saint-Lazare. But this document, dictated evidently by the need of the unfortunate man who, in ending it, puts the whole blame on his "distracted brain," would be of little real value if a friend of the duchess, an honourable man, the Abbé Aunillon, whom I have already mentioned, had not given us still another and quite different explanation. He thinks that a Court lady, whom he has in his eye but does not name, a person of consideration, jealous, and no doubt a rival of the Duchesse de Bouillon, and fully as powerful as she, contrived the whole plot, not to poison Mlle. Le Couvreur, but to throw suspicion on the unfortunate duchess, whose name she used, and thus ruin her reputation. The abbé adds that the duchess, being on her death-bed, seven years later, made, in presence of her friends and her whole household, a general confession of her faults and her transgressions (of which there were many), but that she firmly protested her entire innocence in the matter of Mlle. Le Couvreur.

All things combined at one and the same moment to excite and inflame the public interest around the coffin

of the beloved actress. The rector of Saint-Sulpice, Languet, refused to allow her body to be buried in consecrated ground. She had made a considerable bequest in her will to the poor of his parish. On the day of her death she said to a vicar who came to see her: "Do not be uneasy, monsieur l'abbé; I know what brings you here; I have not forgotten your poor in my will." True, it is added, that, turning towards a bust of the Comte de Saxe, she exclaimed: "There is my universe, my hope, my gods!"

M. de Maurepas wrote to the lieutenant of police that it was not Cardinal de Fleury's intention to enter into any question of ecclesiastical sepulture, but to leave the affair to the Archbishop of Paris, and to the rector of Saint-Sulpice. "If they persist in refusing it to her, as seems likely," he wrote, "she must be carried away at night and buried with the least possible scandal." The body was therefore taken by night, in a hackney-coach; and two street porters, guided by a single friend, M. de Laubinière, buried her in a deserted wood-yard, in the faubourg Saint-Germain, near the present south-east corner of the rue de Grenelle and the rue de Bourgogne. The faithful d'Argental, whom she had made her residuary legatee, did not think that he compromised his character as a magistrate by accepting that confidential mission, and he thereby honoured himself in public opinion. The legacy was in reality a trust, for Mlle. Le Couvreur left two daughters to be thus provided for.

Voltaire had one of those spasms of sorrow and sensibility of which he was so capable, and it was then that he wrote those touching lines which every one knows by heart:

"She is no more—and now she is criminal!
She charmed the world—for that you punish her. . . ."

But here I will not expatiate, lest I seem to fall into declamation in speaking of one whose chief merit, on the stage and in her life, was to be truth itself and nature, the very opposite of declamation. Those two simple words sum up the character of Adrienne Le Couvreur.

Voltaire.

Voltaire.

THE truth about men, as about things, is difficult to discover, and when discovered it is no less difficult to preserve. What is our present judgment of Voltaire? We are still disputing, still contradicting, still flinging that name at one another like a weapon of war; making it, as ever, a rallying signal or a rock of offence. I ask permission, having now to speak of him, to hold to my own impressions, gained long before recent debates, and to restate the rather complex judgment which I have tried, for the last twenty years, to form upon him, maturing and rectifying it constantly; wishing to detract in no wise from a great mind, so essentially French in its fine qualities and in its defects; but still less wishing to make of one who respected nothing, or nearly nothing, a personage of moral and philosophical authority, a religion in himself, or an idol.

There is no originality or singularity in this. Three generations have now succeeded one another in which a rather considerable number of minds, starting from very different points of view, have formed a fairly just idea of Voltaire, but an idea which has remained

among them behind closed doors, and has always been questioned by the oncoming youth—for young men, at the moment when they enter active life, seek, unconsciously, in the celebrated men of the past and in the great names in vogue, precedents for their own passions or systems, vehicles for their own train of ideas and ardour. Whether they espouse or exalt them, whether they accept them in part or insult them, it is themselves whom they see through those noted men ; it is their own idea they bow to and extol; it is the idea that opposes theirs which they flout and depreciate. To see things as they are, and men as they have been, is the part of an intellect that has grown unbiased—an effect, I fear, of refrigeration.

I have said that for three generations Voltaire has been soundly appreciated by certain minds, although their judgments came to no purpose, and were never consolidated or established among us. Let us consider. In his lifetime, he was perfectly known and judged, for his good qualities as well as for his defects, for his fine and charming gifts as well as for his follies and his detestable perversities, by the persons of his society, and, up to a certain point, by his friends. Whosoever will gather from the correspondences of that day the sayings and judgments upon him of Mme. Du Deffand, President Hénault and others of that set, Frederick the Great, President de Brosses, Mme. de Créquy, will gain an idea of the true Voltaire, not a man indorsed, idealised, and ennobled by the

VOLTAIRE.

After the drawing by Ferney.

spirit of party, but one to whom the full glory of his talents is given. But this opinion of certain clear-sighted and well-informed witnesses has been little known. The remote distance at which Voltaire kept himself in his last years, the reverence he inspired from afar in his precincts of Ferney to the new generations who had seen nothing of his petulant youth, the concert of praises which his clever and indefatigable old age excited in France and in Europe—all this prepared the apotheosis in which he himself was extinguished, and against which very few protestations were then raised.

Nevertheless, he had against him, at bottom, even in the philosophical party then triumphant, the disciples and votaries of Rousseau, whom he had misconceived and insulted. After the Revolution had completed its work of ruin, many of Voltaire's former adorers detached themselves more than half-way from that worship; they felt the value of the institutions he had rashly sapped; they told themselves that he, too, would have regretted them as they did; they took better account of his inconsistencies and, while preserving their admiration for an inimitable and seductive intellect, they came at last to judge him with a moral severity justified by experience. Marie-Joseph Chénier continued to admire everything in Voltaire, and the "Epistle" which he addressed to him might be made the brilliant programme of the Voltaireans. But men of taste, whose minds had opened to

perceptions of a higher order, men, for instance, like M de Fontanes, knew better how to distinguish what Voltaire merited as a charming author from what was due to him as an indecent satirist, an imprudent and inexcusable philosopher. In this second generation Voltaire found, therefore, enlightened judges, very just in their estimates, and well able to distinguish between his merits and demerits.

As for those I call the third generation, in which I take the liberty of placing the men of my own age after those who are a dozen years older, it is less an excessive admiration they have had to recover from than a sentiment more or less the reverse. The influence of M. de Chateaubriand (in some respects a fairly impartial judge of Voltaire), that of Mme. de Staël, in other words, Rousseau still, the awakening of a spiritual philosophy respectful to human nature, the action also of the religious Renascence which touched imaginations if not hearts, the literary influence that breathed from the land of Schiller and Goethe, and from that of Shakespeare, Byron, and Walter Scott —all these diverse general causes acted strongly upon many among us at our first reading of Voltaire. Some were inclined to deny him too much. But in time, and by losing their juvenile haughtiness and rigidity, men were led to do more justice to this natural human being, to this language that seeks to be only the swift medium of agreeable good sense, and to which, after so many adventurous flights and fatiguing

varieties of style, they are glad to return to refresh themselves as if from the material source. They have been brought to recognise those many qualities of quick precision, of sarcastic reason, and grace. I say, therefore, without thinking that I grant to ourselves too much, that in this third generation, more than one mind has, without wavering on essential points, come to see in Voltaire what ought to be seen when considered for himself, and for the immediate consequences that resulted from his works.

But those consequences (and here is the misfortune) were not only immediate and related to his time: they will still flow on and influence for generations; they are far from being exhausted. The man and the writer in Voltaire may be thoroughly known and defined, at any rate they can be; but the combatant and the leader of a Voltaire party will still continue. Like a dead general, whose name is the pledge of victory, his followers have tied him on his horse, and the battle rages round him as round a mighty warrior. He is the champion of immortal quarrels. In vain may we look for impartiality in that *mêlée!* Sorry effort of a posterity that continually turns tail and retreats! What pains it takes to attain to righteousness, to see the right, and when it has all but reached that point, in a moment here are new-comers, who convulse everything, put all at stake once more, and in the name of their passions or their convictions choose to see but one side, are excessive in their

enthusiasms as they are in their invectives, and compel the whole work to be done over again.

The various volumes of Voltaire's "Letters" enable us to make a rapid survey of his life. At twenty-four years of age we find him in Paris spending his time among the Villars, Sullys, Richelieus, etc.; he floated on the top wave of the great world, at his ease and as if he belonged there, but with a slight touch of insolence that denotes conquest. These were the days of the Regency, when ranks were becoming mixed. Voltaire, conscious of intellect, sees no limit to his upward flight; from the first, he makes his way on a footing of equality with great people. The latter caress and spoil him, until the day comes when one of them makes him feel that all is not won, that favour is not claim, and that tolerance is not right. Meantime, in the midst of his social successes, and while working at his tragedies and his epic poem, Voltaire bethinks him of making his fortune. By a sure channel which he has to the Regent (he was in the way of having several through his friends) he obtains the promise of a licence for the formation of a company of some sort, for which he finds the capitalists.

Admire who will this faculty of Voltaire at twenty-four years of age for writing tragedies, epic poems, and attending to *business!* He foresaw, he said, that he must be rich in order to be independent. I think his foresight was less than his obedience to a natural

inclination, to a need in his nature very strongly marked, which was noted by all who knew him; but he combined it well with an air of fashion and of the great world. That great world and its salons made him, in some respects, an accomplished man, a poet with the easiest and liveliest turn of phrase, a man of Letters with a taste that was naturally elegant. When we think only of the ideal of pleasure, of the charm of delicate raillery and urbanity, we like to picture to ourselves Voltaire in that enjoyment of society into which, at various times in his life, he entered, but from which he was always fleeing.

"*Mon Dieu,* my dear Cideville," he writes to a friend of those days, "what a delightful life it would be to lodge with three or four men of Letters with talents and no jealousy, to love one another, live quietly, cultivate one's art, talk of it, enlighten ourselves mutually! I picture to myself that I shall some day live in this little Paradise, of which I desire you shall be the god."

This letter was written in 1732, that is to say, after his life in England. The personages of this ideal intimacy, which he saw from afar, were to be such as Formont, Cideville, Des Alleurs, Mme. Du Deffand, President de Maisons, Genonville, the élite of the friends of his first or his second youth: persons of intelligence and safe intercourse, judging everything, laughing at all, but among themselves, not letting the public share their laughter; persons who knew everything, or thought they did, taking the world handsomely and ironically, and chiefly concerned in making

themselves happy together by the pleasures of conversation and communicative study without constraint.

But Voltaire, in being the divinity of such a society, in moderating himself sufficiently to be contented in it, and in condemning himself to lead the life of a perfectly polished man, would have been no more than a very accomplished Voiture and a superior Hamilton: he had in him other stuff, other faculties, which were at once an honour and a danger to him. Often in life he made part of those delightful coteries (*suavissimam gentem,* he said) which were formed for a moment around him, rallying to his light, coteries of which he was the genius and the soul, and from which he soon departed through some accident. He was usually the cause of that accident; and this resulted from a defect and from a good quality. The defect was the need of action at any cost, the need of fame and renown, which did not deny itself intrigues and manœuvres, and worked with doubtful tools; hence a whole series of indiscretions, concealments, retractations, disavowals, falsehoods; in short, an infinity of miserable things. The good quality was a passion, often sincere, and a conviction on points that concerned humanity. But even after he became what, in any case, he could not have hindered himself from being,—the king of the poets of his day and the leader of the philosophic party,—even then Voltaire had regrets; he had the habits of a man of society, of the author of society, and he would fain have remained such. To

hear him, the man of incessant publicity, who wearied fame, one would think he never, or scarcely ever, published a book by his own will but always reluctantly: he had a secretary who stole his manuscripts; an indiscreet friend who hawked his writings about; a piratical publisher had got possession of his property and was spoiling it, falsifying it, and thus he was forced to print his productions himself that the public might have them in their integrity. Such were his apologies. "How is it that they have printed my letter to the Abbé Dubois?" he wrote to Thieriot in 1739; "I am much mortified; it is very hard to be always a public man." All his life it was his pretension to lead the existence of a literary nobleman, who lives on his own fortune, amuses himself, plays tragedy in society, is gay with his friends, and laughs at all the world. "I am very sorry," he wrote to d'Argental from Ferney in 1764, "that they have printed *Ce qui plaît aux dames* and *l'Éducation des filles;* this is withering little flowers that are charming only when they are not sold in the market." It is, however, certain that Voltaire, from his earliest entrance into society, before the buffoon's laugh and the fleshless grin, Voltaire, in the bloom of his gaiety and malice, was, by temperament as well as by principle, the poet and the artist of an epoch whose avowed end and inspiration was pleasure—pleasure before all else.

But the most agreeable circles did not suffice Voltaire, and could not hold him; he left them, at all

moments, as I have said, partly from his own fault, and partly for reasons more serious and laudable. He left them because he had *le diable au corps*—the devil was in him; and also because there were some sparks of a god there too. To scoff is very amusing; but it is only a slight pleasure if we cannot scoff at people to their faces; if the "silly foes" we deride are not informed of our derision; hence many sallies and imprudent skirmishes, which soon became war to the death between those foes and himself.

The stage, the drama, which Voltaire adored and in which he excelled, according to the taste of his day, presented him to the public on a nobler side. History, in which he also excelled,—showing himself especially superior when it was contemporaneous, or nearly so,—invited him to become a serious author in the most respectable meaning of the word, the painter of his own and of the preceding century. Voltaire was interested in all that happened in the world near him, or distant from him; he took part in it, he was fired by it; he busied himself about the affairs of others, and if they stirred his affections, he made them his own. He carried movement, bustle, and confusion wherever he was, becoming either a charm or a torment. That *devil of a man* (it is the name that we give him involuntarily) could not, in any case, in spite of his visions of a quiet retreat and smiling wisdom, confine himself to the gentle and brilliant existence of an Atticus, or even of a Horace, or con-

tent himself with the motto of his life which he politely wrote to Maréchal de Richelieu: "I limit myself to amusing you."

His *Correspondance* gives few details concerning his departure from France in 1726 [caused by his quarrel with the Chevalier de Rohan] and his three years' retirement in England, which was so decisive for his intellectual education. He was doubtless prepared for it by his conversations with Bolingbroke, of whom he had seen much in Paris and at his country-house of La Source, near Orléans; but the impression he received of that new spectacle, less perhaps for its political side and for the working of the Constitution than for the philosophical and liberal-thinking group of men whom he met in England seems to have surpassed his expectations; it made a profound and indelible impression on him. This period of Voltaire's life, these three years of study and of silence, which he began as nothing more than a Sceptic of the Temple and a charming figure in society, and from which he issued a man and a philosopher, still remain obscure and somewhat mysterious, precisely because he passed them in silence. We see by his letters to Sir William Faulkner what strong and tenderly serious ties he there contracted, and how closely and durably he kept their memory. This period seems to me the only one in Voltaire's life that makes us desire fuller details. There is a moment and an environment when talents and minds, until then young and adolescent, complete

that first condition and become adult. England was the place of that change in Voltaire. He returned from there definitively formed, with a fund of ideas that he did not much increase, and with an inward stamp that he never lost.

On his return from England, he seems to have thought of realising his dream of a quiet retreat, where he could shelter his life and embellish it, giving to the world the overflowings only of his mind. It was then that he began his close intimacy with the Marquise du Châtelet, and had his period of Cirey. He lived for her, and through her. If we consider his temper and petulance, and Mme. du Châtelet's character, we may wonder that this *liaison* lasted more than fifteen years and was severed only by death. He was happy in it, save for a few brief storms, domestic squabbles that transpired, the particulars of which were collected by malignant curiosity. He was truly under a charm; he admired her, he proclaimed her sublime, he thought her beautiful; he took pleasure, when writing to Faulkner, in giving his address at her house, the château de Cirey: "Here," he says, "lives a young lady, the Marquise du Châtelet, to whom I have taught English." A shrewd observer said, however:

"Three things spoil Cirey for me—first, this mania for geometry and physics, which sits very ill on Voltaire, in whom it is only an imitation of the marquise; it turns him from his true vocation and from the happy domains of which he is master;—second, these stormy scenes, these sudden household quarrels, brief but burlesque, of which we are, willingly or not, informed; making a critic remark that he had never

MADAME DU CHATELET.

From a copper engraving.

before supposed that the expression 'daggers drawn' was anything more than a metaphor;—and third, the impossibility that Voltaire, though he be now in love, master of the establishment, natural philosopher and geometrician at second hand, should ever really be anything but a man of Letters, from the tips of his fingers to the marrow of his bones. Hence his quarrels with publishers, his sleeplessness, his extraordinary agitation about the copies of *La Pucelle,* his fits of fury, his cries, as of one possessed, against Desfontaines and the Paris pamphlets. It is enough indeed to spoil an Eden."

As for the morality of the eighteenth century, there has been many a case which I have reprobated; but if some readers (as I have reason to know) would like me to condemn oftener and more sternly, I beg them to remark that I succeed much better by inciting them to give the condemnation themselves than if I took the initiative and seemed to impose upon them my judgment at every turn; a course which, in the long run, is sure to weary and disgust a reader with the critic. The reader, moreover, likes to think himself more severe than the critic; I leave him that pleasure. It suffices me to relate and expound faithfully, so that every one may profit by matters pertaining to the intellect and to good language and be in a position to do justice upon the other and wholly moral sides, which I have not tried to conceal.

I continue now to speak of Voltaire and Mme. du Châtelet, who, for fifteen years, were inseparably united. Mme. du Châtelet was not an ordinary person; she occupied a rank in higher literature and philosophy which it was easier for the women of her time to laugh at than to emulate. The love, the

friendship that Voltaire had for her was founded on admiration, an admiration that never failed at any period; and a man like Voltaire could not be so much in love that intellect in him would long be the dupe of his heart. Mme. du Châtelet must, therefore, have had real claims to the admiration of so excellent a judge, and the first of them is that she knew how to retain and charm him.

Her maiden name was Mlle. de Breteuil, and she was born in 1706, twelve years later than Voltaire. She had a fine education, and learned Latin in her childhood. Married to the Marquis du Châtelet, she lived, at first, the life of her period, the life of the Regency, and the Duc de Richelieu was inscribed on the list of her brilliant conquests. Voltaire, who had always known her, did not become intimate with her until after his return from England, about 1733. He was then thirty-nine years old, and Mme. du Châtelet twenty-seven. The mission of Voltaire, at that time, was to naturalise in France the English ideas, the philosophical principles which he had imbibed in reading Locke and in the society of Bolingbroke. But, more than that, having appreciated the soundness and the immensity of Newton's discovery, he blushed to see France still amused by worthless systems while full light reigned elsewhere, and he determined to propagate the true doctrine of knowledge of the universe, with which he mingled his ideas of philosophic deism. Mme. du Châtelet was a woman

to second him—what am I saying?—to precede him in that path.

She loved the exact sciences, and felt herself impelled to them by a true vocation. Beginning to study mathematics, first with Maupertuis, and then fundamentally with Clairaut, she made remarkable progress and soon outstripped Voltaire, who was content to admire without being able to follow her. Mme. du Châtelet wrote and published *Les Institutions de Physique,* in which she explained the particular ideas of Leibnitz; but her great title to distinction is that she translated into French Newton's immortal "Principia." To it she added an algebraic commentary, in which she was assisted by Clairaut. Thus, by inscribing her name below that of Newton she seemed already to invoke Laplace's method of exposition. What an honour for a woman to have been able to slip her name between two such names!

That honour would have cost Mme. du Châtelet dear, during her lifetime, had she been sensitive to ridicule and to epigrams. In other days, the beautiful Hypatia, mathematician and astronomer, was stoned at Alexandria by the populace. Mme. du Châtelet, less beautiful, it appears, and without all the virtues of Hypatia, was not stoned, but she underwent the sharp mockery of the society in which she lived; the wittiest of all societies and the most malicious. I do not think there exists in the French language a more savage page, more bitterly, more cruelly satirical than

the Portrait of the "divine Emilie," drawn by Mme. du Deffand (her intimate friend), which begins with these words: "Picture to yourself a tall, gaunt woman, without, etc., etc." It should be read in Grimm, having been mutilated and "softened" elsewhere. I dare not transcribe it, lest it burn this paper. It seems to have been written by a cold-blooded Fury, who knew how to write, and who steeped her pen in gall or vitriol. On every line is the pitiless word. The poor victim is denied, not only the natural use of her good qualities but even that of her defects. The final stroke is the most treacherous, the most humiliating of all; the writer shows her fastening, at any cost, on the celebrity of M. de Voltaire: "It is he who renders her an object of public attention, and the subject of special conversations; she will owe it to him in time to come that she lives; meantime she owes him that which *enables her to live now.*"

To this Portrait should be added, to complete the satire, passages from Mme. de Staal-Delaunay's letters to Mme. du Deffand, which describe graphically but in ugly colours, the entrance of Voltaire and Mme. du Châtelet one evening into the salon of the Duchesse du Maine. "They appeared at the stroke of midnight like two spectres, with an odour of embalmed corpses." They diverted society with their airs and their absurdities, they irritated it with their singularities. Working all day, he at history, she at Newton, they would neither play cards nor move about:

"They are absolute *non-values* in a society where their learned writings are of no account." Mme. du Châtelet, especially, could not find a spot sufficiently quiet, a room silent enough for her meditations:

"Mme. du Châtelet went yesterday to her third lodging," writes Mme. de Staal; "she could not endure the one she had last; there was noise, and smoke without fire (which seems to me her emblem). The noise does not trouble her at night, so she told me, but in the daytime, at her work; it disarranges her ideas. She is now making a revise of her "Principles"; this is an exercise she goes through every year, otherwise they might escape and get away so far she might never recover a single one of them. I think her head is a house of detention for them, and not the place of their birth, so she has to keep them carefully watched. She prefers the fine air of this occupation to all amusement, and persists in not showing herself till night-time. Voltaire makes gallant verses, which do in some sort repair the bad effect of their singular conduct."

The tone of this satire is that of the wittiest and most delicate of feminine pens. In reading the letters of Mme. de Staal to Mme. du Deffand, we cannot help noticing, in the midst of that society, apparently the most civilised and the most courteous, the melancholy character of this sneering gaiety in two women bored by their lives. What a moral and intellectual void is felt in such backbiting, more idle, perhaps, than malicious! what bitter and sterile hardness! It was time that the fire of heaven should fall and burn away those dried husks to renew the earth.

Mme. du Châtelet escaped, at any rate, from such miseries as these; her noble studies, her mental occupations, guarded her from the paltry topics on which the distinguished minds around her consumed themselves.

Voltaire was perhaps mistaken, and had a bandage over his eyes when he wrote: "No one was ever so learned as she, and no one ever deserved so little to have it said of her: 'That is a learned woman.' . . . The ladies who played cards with her in the queen's salon little thought they were seated beside the Commentator on Newton." But he was certainly right when he added: "All that occupied society was within her province, *except its slander.* No one ever heard her criticise an absurdity. She had neither the time nor the will to perceive such things; and when she was told that certain persons did not do her justice, she said she would rather not know it." If the mathematics of Mme. du Châtelet served only to give her this moral superiority, it was much.

We can judge her directly from her letters, and from certain writings in which she painted herself. In the early days of her *liaison* with Voltaire, in 1734, the latter, having taken alarm from information that came to him relating to one of his many imprudences, thought himself obliged to leave Cirey in the depth of winter, and go for safety to Holland. Mme. du Châtelet, in her intense anxiety, writes to the good friend of her friend, to M. d'Argental, begging him to clear up the affair, and bring about the return of him without whom she cannot live:

"I am," she says, "one hundred and fifty leagues from your friend; and it is twelve days since I have had any news of him. Forgive me, forgive me, but my state is dreadful. . . ."

"For fifteen days I was not two hours away from him; and then

I wrote to him from my room to his; and now it is fifteen days that I know not where he is, nor what he does. I have not even the consolation of sharing his misfortune. Forgive me for deafening you with my griefs—but I am so unhappy!"

They fear some danger, but they do not know what. Mme. du Châtelet suspects that the threat may have been a trick against her, to frighten Voltaire, and break up their happiness. In all her letters we see how she distrusts his wisdom when he is away from her, abandoned without advice to his irritability, to his hasty emotions and his petulance. "Believe me," she writes to d'Argental, "do not leave him long in Holland. He may be discreet for a time, but remember 'there is little virtue that resists for ever.'" She is constantly sending him word through d'Argental, to be wise and keep to an *incognito*—an *incognito* for Voltaire! that man, that child, with a passion for celebrity! She fears that he may accustom himself, over there, to do without her: liberty has great charms and so have Dutch publishers; those publishers who tempt you to print all, and say all. She has a fixed idea that he must be made to behave wisely "over there," and not put too much into those Dutch editions. "Above all, he must not put in *Le Mondain*" (this refers to an affair of State at that time, on which the life of a man depended). "It is necessary at every moment," she cries, "to save him from himself; and I use more policy to guide him than the Vatican employs to keep Christianity in its fetters." This last remark is at least solemn and may seem

disproportionate; but thus it is that passion reasons. On the next page she will speak of him with tender solicitude as a child: "We are sometimes very obstinate," she says; "this demon of reputation, which I think very ill-understood, never quits us."

Voltaire remained in Holland to obey his nature and commit imprudences. He sent to the Prince Royal of Prussia (afterwards Frederick the Great) a manuscript on *La Métaphysique;* and that *Métaphysique,* if printed, is of such a nature that it would ruin its author for ever. Mme. du Châtelet perceives the folly; she complains to d'Argental sadly and eloquently:

"If any friend twenty years old asked him for a manuscript, he ought to refuse it; but to send it to an unknown youth, and a *prince!* Why should he let his future tranquillity depend on another man? and that from no necessity, solely out of silly vanity (for I cannot falsify the proper word) to show to a person, who is not a judge, a work in which he will see nothing but the imprudence of it. He who confided his secrets with such levity deserves to be betrayed. And I, what have I done that he should make the happiness of my life hang upon the prince-royal? I own to you I feel outraged. . . ."

That is the complaint of a woman who feels her rights; yet, at the same moment, she loves him; she calls him "a creature so lovable at all points"; she sees none but him in the universe, and proclaims him "the finest ornament of France." Elsewhere, the happy expression escapes her: "It is my belief that the persons who persecute him have never read him." She is evidently under the charm: love, for her, has taken the path of intellect.

A reflection, however, presents itself, and she her-

self could not help making it: what temerity to go and confide her happiness, her fate, all her future as a woman, to a man of Letters such as Voltaire, to a poet so much of a poet, and to be at the mercy, every day, of his irritable temperament! The fate of these two united beings was always hanging on the chances of vanity or of petulance. Àpropos of the perpetual disturbances that Voltaire's thoughtless capers brought into the daily life of Mme. du Châtelet, the good souls of those days were never weary of talking; they pitied her openly; President Hénault, one of her best friends, wrote to Mme. du Deffand: "That poor du Châtelet ought to have put into the lease of every house she hires a clause about Voltaire's follies. Truly, it is incredible that a man should be so inconsiderate."

If you are a woman, if you are wise, and if your heart, though taking fire, will give itself time to choose, listen to a piece of advice: love neither a Voltaire, nor a Jean-Jacques, nor a Goethe, nor a Chateaubriand, if such great men should cross your path. Love—whom then? Love whoso fully and honestly returns you the same; love whoso has a whole heart to give you, though he bear no celebrated name and may even call himself the Chevalier Des Grieux. An honourable Des Grieux and a virtuous Manon—that is the ideal of those who know how to be happy in silence; fame as the third in a *tête-à-tête* spoils all.

But we moralists may talk as we please, the realities of life are not perfectly regulated by rule. Mme. du Châtelet loved Voltaire, and in rendering account of it to herself she passes over this point. At heart, he loves better (and she knows it) to publish his *Métaphysique* and to set it in the broadest light, than to sacrifice it without a word to love and good sense. There is the man of Letters, in the plain truth of his nature.

This was, nevertheless, the point at which the *liaison* between Mme. du Châtelet and Voltaire began to weaken. Three years later, in 1738, Voltaire was seized with one of his literary freaks which "entirely altered the charming sweetness of his manners." A libel of the Abbé Des Fontaines had so put him beside himself that he wanted, every time that the post brought him letters, to start for Paris to see the ministers, the lieutenant of police, to present a petition, to lay a complaint, and pursue his vengeance to extinction. Mme. du Châtelet could not succeed in calming him, nor in convincing him that the happiness of two choice beings cultivating together philosophy and Letters, ought not to depend on miserable insults coming from low sources. The terrestrial paradise of Cirey was now a hell of wrath and disquietude. "Truly, it is very hard," she writes, "to pass one's life battling in the bosom of retirement and happiness. Good God! if he would only believe us" (d'Argental and herself) "he would be happy!"

But things were much worse three or four years later, during a stay they made at Brussels, when Voltaire escaped her altogether for politics. He had taken it into his head to obtain a secret mission from the ministry of Foreign Affairs to the King of Prussia. I do not know whether it was diplomatic ambition, the temptation of another career, or merely the simple attraction of novelty, that seized him at this moment. He departed, rushed through the lesser principalities, and went from Berlin to Baireuth (October, 1743). "He is *drunk,* absolutely, he is *mad* about Courts and Germany." The King of Prussia is evidently Mme. du Châtelet's great rival at this time—"singular rival" she adds, bitterly. She remains whole weeks without hearing from him, and learns of his journeyings hither and thither from the newspapers; her heart is wounded:

"How many things to reproach him with! how far his heart is from mine! . . . To be forced to complain of him is a sort of torture that I never knew before. . . . All I have endured for a month past would, perhaps, alienate any woman but me; but, though he may make me unhappy, he cannot diminish my feelings. . . . His heart has much to make amends for if it is still to be worthy of mine."

Evidently, no matter what she says, she is becoming weaned from him. These painful impressions may have softened and concealed themselves when Voltaire, his caprice exhausted, returned to the magic circle of Cirey; but a sad conviction remained in the depths of Mme. du Châtelet's heart; we find traces of

it in a little treatise she wrote about this time on "Happiness"; towards the close of which she says:

"I was happy for ten years through the love of him who had subjugated my soul; and those ten years I spent alone with him, without one moment of distaste or of languour. When age and illness diminished his liking, I was long in perceiving it: I loved for the two; I spent my whole life with him, and my heart, exempt from suspicions, enjoyed the pleasure of loving and the illusion of believing myself beloved. It is true that I have lost that happy condition, and not without its costing me many tears.

In writing these pages, she still fancied she could hold fast to what she called the "immutability" of her heart, and that the peaceful sentiment of friendship, joined to the passion for study, would suffice to keep her happy. She was then forty years old and, stoic and geometrician that she was, she might well think herself in port, when, having gone with Voltaire to pass part of the years 1747 and 1748 at the little Court of Lorraine, this, in two words, is what happened.

She there met, in the society of the Marquis de Bouflers, a man thirty years of age; elegant, agreeable, witty, although of a somewhat dry and barren mind; known at that time by an "Epistle to Chloe," a rather pretty piece in the sensuous style. This was M. de Saint-Lambert. He played the gallant to her; and she forgot for him her philosophic reflections, or, rather, she remembered them. Feeling that passion revived in her, she took it at its word, and, putting her principles into action, she gave herself up to it. The results are well known; an incident, half-grotesque,

indecent, and fatal followed, which occupied the minds and tongues of society, and led to the death of Mme. du Châtelet six days after the birth of her child, September 10, 1749.

The impression that this death made on Voltaire was keen, and did honour to his sensibility. His secretary, Longchamps, relates, in great detail, the manner in which he took the whole affair; his first anger and fury at finding himself deceived, then his half-laughable, yet touching resignation. The loss of Mme. du Châtelet drew real tears from his eyes, interrupted now and then by some of those sharp, petulant, sensible words he never could refrain from saying, and which incline us to apply to him, in parody, Homer's saying: "He wept with an outburst of laughter." Three or four days after this death, as he fretted much about a ring Mme. du Châtelet wore, which had his portrait under the setting, Longchamps told him that he had taken the precaution to remove the ring, but the portrait within it was that of M. de Saint-Lambert. "O Heaven!" cried Voltaire, raising and clasping his hands: "such are women! I displaced Richelieu, Saint-Lambert turns me out! that 's in the order of things; one nail drives out another: so goes the world!"

Mme. du Châtelet's eyes were scarcely closed, before Voltaire wrote to Mme. du Deffand to announce the death: "It is to the sensibility of your heart that I have recourse in my despair." We remember the

satirical portrait; verily, the friend in despair chose a good confidant!

Voltaire's existence was stranded and everything thrown again into doubt and confusion by the death of Mme. du Châtelet. Deprived of the friend who had steadied him, who had held the tiller for him, he neither knew what to do nor where to turn. He was very near doing something desperate. His first idea was to retire to the abbey of Sénones, near Father Calmet, and to plunge into study; his second was to go to England, near to Lord Bolingbroke, and give himself up to philosophy. He took, at first, a wiser course, which was to go to Paris and talk of Mme. du Châtelet with d'Argental and the Duc de Richelieu, and to distract his mind by having his tragedies acted before him in his own house. But the cajoleries of the King of Prussia, which Mme. du Châtelet had counteracted as best she could and as long as she lived, returned to tempt him. He resisted no longer, and he went, at fifty-six years of age, to that last and sad *schooling* of Prussia, whence he returned less agitated, and, apparently, a little wiser.

Frederick the Great was Prince Royal of Prussia, and twenty-four years of age, when he began his correspondence with Voltaire in 1736, four years before he ascended the throne. Voltaire was then living at Cirey, where he received from the young prince, not a letter of compliment but a truly passionate declaration. We may smile to-day at that first letter,

awkward as it was, in which Frederick mixes his admiration for Wolff with that he feels for Voltaire, and speaks to the latter in the name of "sweetness," and "the support that you give to all those who are vowed to art and the sciences." But all through the singular style of Frederick's first letters a noble thought makes itself felt. Considering Voltaire from a distance and by his works only, embracing him with that enthusiasm of youth which it is honourable to have felt once in our lives, Frederick proclaims him the sole heir of the great century that has lately ended, "the greatest man of France and a mortal who does honour to language." He admires and salutes him, without as yet perceiving the faults of the man, and solely for the beauties of his mind and the graces of his style. He declares himself his disciple—his disciple not only in his writings but in his actions; for, deceived by distance and the golden mists of youth, he sees in him almost a Lycurgus and a Solon, a legislator and a sage. Let us not smile too broadly. No one ever felt more truly than this young prince what Letters might be in their highest inspiration, what they have in them that is lofty and useful, what their glory possesses that is durable and immortal. "I count it one of the greatest honours of my life to be born the contemporary of a man of such distinguished attainments as yours." This sentiment shines through the whole of this phase of their correspondence. Voltaire is charmed; he flatters also; he

thanks, he lauds, he enchants; one cannot truly say that he is scoffing under his breath; and no doubt he did not then laugh too much at certain solecisms and vulgarities of tone that often accompanied this Northern homage. In return, he thinks the young prince "writes verses like Catullus in Cæsar's time"; he plays the flute "like Télémaque — he is Augustus-Frederick-Virgil." "Enough!" says Frederick, who here has the advantage in good sense and good taste: "I am not, I assure you, a candidate for a great man; I am merely a simple individual who is known only to a small part of this continent, and whose name, according to all appearance, will not do more than decorate a genealogical tree and then drop into obscurity and oblivion." Voltaire had the face to tell him, on one occasion, that he wrote better French than Louis XIV; that Louis the XIV did not know how to spell, and other puerile things of that sort; as if Louis XIV had not been one of the men in his kingdom whose speech was of the best! Here, again, Frederick stops Voltaire, and teaches him a lesson in tact:

"Louis XIV," he said, "was a great prince in a vast number of ways; a solecism, a mistake in spelling could not tarnish in the least the glory of his reputation, established by so many actions that have immortalised him. He could say in every sense: *Cæsar est supra grammaticans* . . . I am great in nothing; nothing but my diligence will ever make me of use to my country; and that is all the glory to which I aspire."

The first meeting of the two men took place in

1740, at the château de Meurs on the Meuse, where Voltaire went to pay his respects to the new king in the first months of his reign. It was ten years later (1750) that he made his visit to Berlin, after the death of Mme. du Châtelet.

In Frederick's admiration for Voltaire, there was a mixture of truth and justice and of error and illusion. He felt with delight "the gaiety of that brilliant imagination." He enjoyed that lively, familiar, joyous genius: "It is not given to every one," he told him, "to make the mind laugh." No words could better render the species of attraction, the sparkling, gushing gift so peculiar to Voltaire. Even towards the end, and while wishing him "kinder feelings," he still salutes him as "the finest organ of reason and truth." All that is truly felt and accurately expressed. But when Frederick admired in Voltaire a great poet above all others, when he saw in the *Henriade* the *ne plus ultra* of epics, and puts it above the "Iliad" and the "Æneid," he proves his want of ideality, and shows to what a point he limited his horizons in this direction.

"What pleasures can surpass those of the mind?" he cries—the mind,—that is to say, brilliant reasoning, gay and lively reasoning; that is the whole secret of his passion for Voltaire. This passion (for that is the right word) was reciprocated. Voltaire cannot conceal that he, the great coquette, was captivated by Fréderick, and in the witty but contemptible libel, so untrustworthy, which he wrote after his flight from Berlin to

avenge himself on the king, he could not refrain from saying, in speaking of Potsdam: "The suppers were very agreeable. I do not know if I am mistaken, but it seems to me there was much wit; the king had it, and brought it out in others." Observe the charm even in the anger. Such was the irresistible seduction they exercised on each other, and which survived even friendship.

It was Frederick's desire to assemble around him the *élite* of the distinguished men of his time, and he seemed for a while to be succeeding. He expected to lead abreast matters of science and the *personnel* of all the great minds with a precision that was almost administrative: "My *savants* arrive in the autumn," he writes, "and I hope to collect in Berlin all that this age has produced that is most famous." These hopes were crowned when, in 1750, he obtained Voltaire. But he paid dear, as we know, for that brief satisfaction, and Voltaire also. The manner in which Frederick writes of him to his sister, the Margravine of Baireuth, and of his other *beaux esprits* is piquant.

Voltaire, in this famous sojourn, quarrelled finally with Frederick because he had begun suit after suit, wrangling first with his *confrères,* the other men of Letters, and introducing civil war into the Academy.

"Voltaire's affair" (a suit against Hirschel) "is not yet finished," writes Frederick to his sister, February 2, 1751. "I think he will shuffle out of it; he will not be less clever, but his character will be more de-

spised than ever. I shall see him when it is all over. But, in the long run, I would rather live with Maupertuis than with him. Maupertuis's character is sure, and he has more of the art of conversation than the poet, who, if you do not take good care, will dogmatise."

This is the first time that I find Voltaire accused of dogmatising; and I am not surprised that so few people have made that accusation—very few were in a position to do so. Voltaire on becoming celebrated had no equals; every one in his presence lowered his flag, and listened willingly. Provided he came forward and was himself, no one thought that he talked too much. Frederick, who liked to contradict in his turn, and to cross swords without yielding ground, encountered in Voltaire an interlocutor, both peremptory and intolerant: they were, after all, two *king minds;* they could have fine interviews, rather than habitual and equal conversations.

Under the seduction of Voltaire's mind, Frederick held out as long as he could against the squabbles and dissensions to which the great man's sojourn in Berlin gave rise. He expresses, however, more than one thought of sound good sense and practical morals, which might serve as a lesson to literary men of all time:

"Here," he writes to his sister, March 13, 1752, "the Devil is incarnate in my men of Letters; there is no doing anything with them. These fellows have no intelligence except for society; they

are severe on their own works for fear of being criticised by others, and indulgent to their conduct—which is usually ridiculous, for they believe it will never reach posterity."

"You behold me still terrified (June, 1752), by my adventures with these gentlemen my *beaux esprits;* I have been a good deal splashed, as always happens where you try to separate folks who are fighting."

"It must be a consolation to animals to see that people with minds are often no better than they."

I give only the moralising of Frederick upon his strife with Voltaire. As for his judgments on the man, they are too severe, too harsh for any French pen to copy them willingly. The Margravine of Baireuth, who had seen things from some distance, continued, even at the moment of the great outburst, to be indulgent to the poet. He continued to write to her, and in the height of the storm he took pains to conciliate her. She was won by the charm, the witty, amusing, charming gift that won back Frederick himself later; she did as posterity has done; she laughed, and was disarmed. In that she was very French.

In after years, at a critical and decisive moment after the battle of Kolin, in 1757, she bethought herself of using Voltaire's devotion to her and his desire to repair the wrongs he had done to Frederick. She wrote to him in the month of August of that year. The object was to save Frederick, detach him from the Coalition, or at least to check France by convincing her, in one way or another, that it was not to her interest that the King of Prussia should be destroyed; and that if evil happened to him, she would later repent of it. Voltaire, then living in Switzerland, set to work with

great activity (the details of this belong elsewhere). Frederick, informed by his sister, sent Voltaire the following lines:

> " For me, threatened by shipwreck,
> I ought, facing the storm,
> To think, live, die, as a king."

In Voltaire's reply he redeemed his past ill-conduct by the good sense and the frankness of his remonstrances:

" The Catos and Othos, whose death Your Majesty thinks noble, had nothing else they could do but fight or die; Otho, in fact, was not sure whether he would be allowed to live; he prevented, by a voluntary death, a death he might have been made to suffer. Our morality and your situation are far from requiring such an act. In a word, your life is needed; you know how dear it is to a numerous family, and to all those who have the honour to approach you; you know that the affairs of Europe are never long on the same basis, and that it is the duty of a man like you to hold himself in readiness for events. I dare to say more: believe me, if your courage led you to that heroic extremity, it would not be approved; your partisans would condemn it, and your enemies would triumph."

In the second part of Voltaire's Correspondence with the King of Prussia, when they were reconciled after their quarrel, we find a totally different tone from that in the first part. All illusion is over; nothing is left but that keen delight in intellect which still manifests itself. The primitive Frederick, the juvenile enthusiast has disappeared; he has given place to the philosopher, to the experienced, superior man, who is no longer tentative in anything. Also the *king* is felt

oftener. Each tells the other truths, and, what is rare, endures them. Voltaire utters them to the king, and Frederick returns them: "You have done me great wrongs," he writes to Voltaire. "I have forgiven them all, and I even wish to forget them. But if you had not had to do with a *madman in love with your noble genius,* you would not have got off so well." Yet, after these severe words, too strong not to be just, after these words of the *king,* the *madman in love* with the brilliant mind still lets himself be seen when he adds:

"Do you want sweet things? Very good; I will tell you some truths. I esteem in you the finest genius that the ages have borne; I admire your poesy, I love your prose; above all, those little pieces in your literary *Mélanges.* Never has any author before you had a tact so keen, a taste so sure and delicate as you have. You are charming in conversation; you know how to amuse and instruct at the same time. You are the most seductive being that I know, capable of making yourself loved by all the world when you choose. You have such graces of mind, that you can offend and yet at the same time deserve the indulgence of those who know you. In short, you would be perfect if you were not a man."

Who will say now that he who appreciated Voltaire to this degree, and could practise these French ways of insinuating sweetness after bitterness, was not the man of his time who ranked close to Voltaire in wit?

I think I am well within the truth when I say that the attraction of mind between these two men survived even friendship; though it is evident, when we read the last half of Voltaire's Correspondence with Frederick, that friendship itself was not dead within

them; that it had revived with a lingering of charm combined with reason, and that it was founded no longer on the extravagant, but on the serious and elevated sides of their nature. Frederick, while he combats the always irascible and choleric instincts of Voltaire, now growing old, supports and favours, as much as he can, his beneficent and humane tendencies. He takes pleasure in praising, in encouraging the defender of humanity, of tolerance, the man who reclaimed and repeopled the waste lands of Ferney, as he himself had peopled the sands of the Brandebourg; in a word, he recognised and embraced in the great practical poet his collaborator in a social work and in civilisation. With a remnant of the old worship, or, if you like, with an idolatry still touching, in all the comparisons he establishes between them he gives the advantage to Voltaire, and this in a tone of feeling that cannot be doubted. Speaking of that future of perfected reason of which he scarcely sees the dawn, although, sceptic as he is, he does not despair of it in the future of humanity, he says: "All depends for a man on the time when he comes into the world. Though I came too late, I do not regret it, for I *have seen Voltaire;* and now, though I see him no more, I read him, and he writes to me."

The journey to Prussia in 1750, and his attempt to establish himself in Berlin, were, as we have seen, a sad campaign for Voltaire, about which enough has been said and written, and from which, like him, we

are glad to escape as soon as possible. On his return to France, he was like a man who feels himself over, conscious of bruises on all his limbs. He was very undecided on the choice of a retreat; we find him, successively, at Strasburg (August, 1753), at Colmar, at the abbey of Sénones, at Plombières in the Vosges, and then again at Colmar. He was feeling, at a distance, the pulse of opinion about him in Paris ; meanwhile he searched for some frontier region where he could settle in safety. A year went by in observation and restlessness; he was then in his sixty-first year. He went to Lyons in November, 1754, to confer with his friend the Maréchal-Duc de Richelieu; the cold reception he met with from the archbishop, Cardinal de Tencin, uncle, nevertheless, of his friend d'Argental, made him realise to what an extent he was compromised at the Court of France. It was then that he made the decision to go at once into Switzerland with his niece, Mme. Denis. He settled first at Lausanne and, soon after, at *Les Délices,* outside the gates of Geneva.

These first years in Switzerland are marked by much joy and gaiety. Voltaire felt that he was once more free; he mingled in the life of the region, and made it accept his own life; he acted his comedies and tragedies at home, and found actors at hand, and not at all bad ones, for the principal parts. At the same time he renewed a close correspondence with his friends in Paris, d'Alembert in particular, with

whom he began an intercourse of letters that never afterwards ceased. This Correspondence of Voltaire with d'Alembert is essential as giving the key to his life. It should be read by itself, and consecutively, as it appears in the first edition, and not as it is given in the Beuchot edition, where it is fused into the general Correspondence. The life of Voltaire was a comedy: the Correspondence with d'Alembert lets us see behind the scenes and back of the stage; the rest is, more or less, before the footlights.

Voltaire was hardly settled in Switzerland, before he began to send to d'Alembert articles for the *Encyclopédie,* which until then had pursued its way in peace and unmolested. Voltaire now gave d'Alembert excellent literary advice on the method of carrying on such an enterprise; but he was not long in mingling with it counsels of another order, for instance: "During the war of the parliaments with the bishops, sensible people will have a fine chance; you will have freedom to stuff the *Encyclopédie* with truths it would not have dared to utter twenty years ago. When pedants fight, philosophers triumph." The squabbles now began. D'Alembert who wrote the article *Genéve* in the *Encyclopédie,* calling in question the sincere faith in Jesus Christ of the Protestant ministers, roused public opinion in Geneva, and Voltaire, being on the spot, was made to feel it. He wrote, nevertheless, to d'Alembert: "Do not retract, do not seem to yield to these wretches by renouncing the *Encyclopédie.*" For

d'Alembert was disgusted, and the enterprise was beginning to meet with serious opposition in Paris. Here Voltaire, while he was leading in Switzerland the life of a great seigneur, apparently occupied only with pleasures of the mind, shows himself, in his letters to d'Alembert, as the ardent organiser of all that concerns and affects the common cause. In every line we find the fervent zealot, the grand-master, or the general-in-chief haranguing his lieutenants, of whom d'Alembert is, in Paris, the leader: "I cannot conceive why those who work for the *Encyclopédie* do not assemble and declare they will renounce everything unless they are sustained. Make yourselves a body, Messieurs; a body is always respected. . . . Rise up, and you will be masters."

I said once that at the time of Montesquieu's death the army of the men of Letters was neither afoot nor enrolled. It was to set it on its feet that Voltaire worked ardently.

Voltaire in his youth had been alone, without partisans, without support; the recollection of his life so often broken up, so agitated, made him feel the importance of making for himself a party, an army, which he would fain organise from a distance, without putting his own person too much under fire; hence he spurred on d'Alembert and his friends. The *Encyclopédie,* which rallied the men of Letters, seemed to him an excellent opportunity. When the existence of that heavy machine is threatened, he talks of no-

thing but of rushing, all of them, sword in hand, a "square battalion," to defend it. But, meanwhile, he leads a free and joyous life in his country-house on the shores of the lake, and invites to dinner the very ministers whose susceptibility and conscience d'Alembert has wounded. "It is not at all to make fun of them," he writes, "but one must be polite. You can scoff at everything and be gay."

D'Alembert, on the other hand, less petulant and more stable, plays a cool game; holding back Voltaire and keeping his hold upon him; often excited by him, he, in turn, excites Voltaire if he sees him relaxing, and winds him up again; he irritates him through his little passions, and carefully foments his anger; he suggests to him, by name, certain victims. All this Correspondence is *ugly;* it has an odour of schemes and plots, of confederates and secret societies. From whatever point of view we consider it, it does no honour to men who erected falsehood into a principle, and who regarded contempt for their fellows as the first step towards enlightening them: "Enlighten and despise the human race!" Sad trumpet-call, but it was theirs. "Advance, with a sneer, brethren, in the path of Truth!" That was their perpetual chorus.

But Voltaire, who had been caught in a net more than once, thought best to be on his guard. His country-house, *Les Délices,* was too near Geneva; it would not be glorious for him who had been under

the claws of a king in Berlin to fall under those of a little republic of *bourgeois* sovereigns: "I have a house in the neighbourhood which cost me more than one hundred thousand francs," he writes in January, 1757, "but they have not yet pulled it down." This proves that the idea of some such danger had come to him. It was then that he began to seek more than one abiding-place, where he could make his home at various times; and he bought Ferney (in October, 1758), which became, in the end, his only and all-sufficient residence.

One of his first cares in his retreat was to bring up, educate, and provide a dowry for the grand-niece of Corneille; he also undertook a commentary on Corneille's works. Whatever judgment may be passed on that work as a whole, he planned it for a good purpose, and began it with great zeal:

"The enterprise is a delicate one," he writes to a friend in Paris; "I must give an opinion on thirty-two plays; I consult the Academy by every post, and I submit all my opinions to it. I hope that, with this precaution, the work will be useful to Frenchmen and to foreigners. One must give oneself all the occupation one can to make life supportable in this world. What would become of us if we wasted our time in saying: 'We have lost Pondicherry'—'the king's notes have gone down sixty per cent,' etc.? . . . You will admit that such talk would be very dull. So I spend my life in planting, building, commenting on Corneille, trying to imitate him at a distance, and all to escape idleness. . . . The farther I advance in life, the more I find work necessary. It becomes, in the long run, the greatest of pleasures, and takes the place of the illusions we have lost."

In all that I have written of Voltaire, I have endeavoured to present him, not completely, but in his

most honourable and desirable aspect; without, however, concealing the other side; and allowing the man himself to be seen in his verity.

Voltaire [or rather, Jean-François Arouet, for "Voltaire" was a mere fancy name which he took as a youth on coming to make his way in Paris]—Voltaire in his youth was carried along and favoured by circumstances; he never failed to have the wind astern of him from the day when Ninon bequeathed him "enough to buy books" to the day—the first serious and painful day of his life—when he had his encounter with the Chevalier de Rohan. After that, the long residence at Cirey was a period of varied study and happiness. When he quitted Prussia after his second unfortunate experience, he was past middle age, and the man of all others best endowed and best prepared to put to profit the leisure of the retirement into which he entered; where he multiplied productions of all kinds with a facility and an abundance which in these days might seem less astonishing, but in his day appeared phenomenal. His health even, of which he was always complaining,—that "Voltairean constitution" at all times "sufficiently robust to sustain the most active labours of the mind, and yet too delicate to bear any other sort of excess,"—was to him a precious fund which he managed, under an air of liberality, with a truly prudent economy. He himself, in one of the prettiest letters in the general "Collection," has reduced to its true value the exaggerated

reputation for universal intelligence which people took pleasure in giving him:

"I have just read a piece," he writes to M. Daquin, censor and critic (1766), "in which you assure people I am happy. You are not mistaken; I think myself the happiest of men; but I ought not to say so; it is cruel to others.

"You quote M. de Chamberlan, to whom you say that I have written that all men are born with an equal portion of intelligence. God preserve me from ever writing such a falsehood! I have, since I was twelve years old, felt and thought quite the contrary. I divined then the enormous quantity of things for which I had no talent. I know that my organs are not arranged to go very far in mathematics. I have proved that I have no inclination for music. God has said to every man: 'Thus far shalt thou go; thou shalt not go farther.' I have some turn in me for learning the European languages; none at all for the Orientals: *Non omnia possumus omnes*. God gave a voice to the nightingales and the sense of smell to dogs, but there are some dogs that have none. What folly to imagine that every man could be a Newton! Ah! monsieur, you were formerly a friend of mine; do not attribute to me the greatest of all impertinences.

"When you have anything curious in the *Semaine* [a sort of literary review published by M. Daquin], send it to me. Rely upon the esteem, the friendship of an old philosopher, who has the folly, in truth, to think himself a very good farmer, but who has not that of thinking he has all the talents."

When Voltaire is in the right, there is no one like him for giving proof of it lightly and easily. His was one of those keen, quick minds that divine more than they know, which have not the patience to carry a demonstration to its end but often grasp at first sight a great truth, and succeed in expressing it in a manner that delights the learned themselves.

We are not to suppose, however, that Ferney changed Voltaire; he was of those who learn nothing

from experience, and correct themselves very little. He lived without constraining himself, according to his whims and inclinations. In him was the irreligious, anti-Christian man, whom the life of Ferney only strengthened by security, and confirmed in his audacity. This characteristic appears in his most ordinary letters; they have all a charming tone, something piquant and brisk, with a graceful air, and then, in the best pages, we nearly always come upon a touch of license, or of impiety, that makes itself felt, even jokingly, at the moment we least expect it. Writing to M. Bordes of Lyons, on the election of Clement XIV, he says (July, 1769):

"I don't know what that friar, Ganganelli, will turn out; all I know is that Cardinal de Bernis nominated him for pope; consequently, he will certainly not be a Sixtus Fifth. It is a pity, as you say, that they did not give us some blunderhead. We needed a fool and I am afraid they have given us a wise man. . . . Abuses are never corrected till they become outrageous."

Those are detestable sentiments, and give a false view of the real interests that are most important to men united in society. Very imprudent and senseless is he who, in any walk of life, prays for excess of evil under a pretext of a total and coming reformation; and complains when at the head of human powers he sees moderation and wisdom.

This same M. Bordes, to whom Voltaire thus wrote, was a former friend of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who had since become the latter's refuter and adversary. In writing to him of Rousseau, Voltaire gives way to

his antipathy for that competitor and powerful collaborator, in whom he persisted in seeing only a madman whom he pitilessly insults:

"Ah! monsieur," he writes to M. Bordes, March, 1765, "you see now that Jean-Jacques resembles a philosopher as a monkey resembles a man. . . . People are rejecting his sophistries, and his person is held in horror by all honest men who have sounded his character. . . . What sort of philosopher is a mischief-maker and an informer? How can any one imagine that the Corsicans have written to him? I assure you there is nothing in it. Let us leave the miserable man to his own opprobrium. Philosophers do not count him among their brethren."

There are not enough insulting words in his vocabulary with which to blast Rousseau; he is "a miserable creature whose heart is as ill-made as his mind"; he is "the dog of Diogenes gone mad." In a letter to M. Thomassin de Juilly, another of Rousseau's opponents, he says:

"That miserable monkey of a Diogenes, who thinks he has taken refuge in the old planks of his cask, but who has not even his lantern, never wrote anything with either good sense or good faith. Provided he can sell his quack medicines he is satisfied. You call him Zoïle; he is that in all the talents and all the virtues."

But in all this violence against Rousseau we must not see jealousy. Voltaire was never jealous; he was passionate, unjust, and in the present case he yielded blindly to all his antipathies of taste and temper against a man who never jested, who turned everything, not to laughter, but to bitterness; who wrote with exaggeration [*emphase*], whose very elevation of tone seemed to Voltaire exaggeration, and who declaimed

as a republican against the arts, the stage: "Remember how that miserable little Jean-Jacques, the turncoat, wrote to me a year ago: 'You corrupt my Republic in return for the asylum she has given you.'" The explanation of Voltaire's contempt for Rousseau is in those words. He understood nothing of the ardent earnestness of this new apostle, or of his hold upon young souls; he saw only a grotesque being, who was now and then eloquent.

Voltaire was not a democrat, and it is well to call this to the minds of those who, at this distance, and in support of their own systems, wish to give us a Voltaire seasoned with Jean-Jacques. When one likes to study men, and see them as they are, one cannot away with these symbolised statues that threaten to be the idols of the future. Voltaire was against majorities, and he despised them; in the matter of sense, the masses seemed to him naturally stupid; he believed that good sense was to be found among the few only, and it was enough for him if by degrees that little group could be enlarged:

"It seems by the late riot," he writes to M. Bordes (November, 1768), "that your people of Lyons are not philosophers; but provided honourable men are, I am satisfied. . . . France would be a very pretty country to live in were it not for the taxes and the pedants. As for the populace, they will always be silly and barbarous—witness what has happened at Lyons. They are oxen who need a yoke, a goad, and fodder."

Miserable words! Voltaire elsewhere ridicules the rumour that his estate at Ferney was to be erected

into a marquisate: "Marquis Crébillon, Marquis Marmontel, Marquis Voltaire!" he exclaims, "good for nothing but to be shown at the fair with Nicolet's monkeys." It is his good taste which scoffs at the title; but his mind, his nature, was aristocratic, and on occasion it carried him far; he was brutally feudal. It has been said that the Revolution, had he lived to witness it, would have distressed him deeply; one thing, however, is very certain, the horrors and the excesses, which mingled from the first with useful reforms, would not have surprised him. In '93, had he been present, he would surely have said: "There they are, my Gauls! I recognise them!" No one has so vividly and frequently exhibited the contrasts that are noticeable in the character of Frenchmen and Parisians at the various epochs of our history. Here is one passage, among a dozen others:

"I have always found it difficult to conceive," he writes to the father of Benjamin Constant in January, 1776, "how a nation so agreeable should be at the same time so ferocious; how it can pass so easily from the Opera to a Saint-Bartholomew, be sometimes composed of monkeys dancing, and sometimes of bears growling; at one and the same time so intelligent and so imbecile, so brave and so cowardly."

And again, more gaily (September, 1770):—"I think nothing can prevent the Pamphlet of La Chalotais from appearing." [The solicitor-general of Brittany, accused of writing anonymous letters to Louis XV, defended himself in a pamphlet.] "The public

will laugh, argue, and get heated; in a month all will be over; in five weeks forgotten."

It must be a Frenchman as French as Voltaire, saying these things of his nation of those and former days to justify a Frenchman of to-day in repeating them. Let us add, in order to be accurate, that in all his pungent and sagacious expressions of opinion, capricious as they sometimes were, Voltaire forgot, or did not foresee, a gradual softening of manners, an insensible and continual progress, to which he himself contributed. The people of Paris have shown in our day, and even in periods of great excesses, that they are no longer the same as the unformed masses who issued from the old society preceding '89.

On settling at Ferney, Voltaire took the whole of himself, his imagination and his caprices, his principles of agitation and of restlessness, with him. We find him, especially in the first years, begetting all sorts of bickerings, even with his own happiness, flying into a passion about his eternal *Pucelle*—for if he did wrong to make her, she punished him well—creating ideal dangers, fancying that Parliament was about to proscribe him, keeping his trunks packed even in mid-winter, and through months of snow, to be able to spring across the frontier, if need be, at a jump. But after a while, he began to feel more secure, thanks to the protection of the Duc de Choiseul [prime minister of Louis XV]; and then he abandoned himself with incredible ardour to the pleasure of building,

planting, peopling his neighbourhood, establishing industries and watch factories, introducing joy, health, and ease of life. He obtained for his manufactories at Ferney and Versoix certain exemptions which favoured the birth of his little colonies. At the fall of M. de Choiseul he was able, while remaining honestly faithful to the dismissed minister — the "illustrious Barmecide" as he called him—to obtain the protection of Chancellor Maupeou. Voltaire felt no aversion to that minister, so unpopular in Paris; distance served him well, and enabled him to see justly on one point at least. He hated the Parliaments, and considered it a great thing to have got rid of those obsolete and henceforth restraining bodies, which would be a perpetual obstacle to all ameliorations and reforms emanating from the royal power. He would never have advised their resuscitation. But it was not until the ministry of M. Turgot and the hopes to which the accession of Louis XVI opened the way, that Voltaire, philosopher and farmer, manufacturer and labourer, seemed to take new life. His letters of this period show very plainly the old man of eighty suddenly rejuvenated, exerting himself to write to the reforming minister and to those who served him,—Trudaine, De Vaines, Dupont de Nemours, etc.,—and gaily crying out: "We are in the Golden Age up to our necks!"

It happened to Voltaire, as it always happens naturally to every great literary renown when joined to a

certain social position, but to him more than to others because of his prodigious activity and the startling proofs he gave of it, that every one, far or near, claimed his good offices; people consulted him, related the wrongs of which they were victims, and solicited the help of his pen and his credit. It was not at Ferney alone that request after request, of all forms and kinds, poured in upon him: sometimes it was Lally-Tollendal, pleading with him to rehabilitate the memory of his father; then it was the directress of a theatre at Lyons whose license had been withdrawn; to-day it was one thing, to-morrow another. Certainly it is a noble idea, which cannot be wholly an illusion, that the more a man is cultivated the better and kinder he must necessarily be; and that in a lofty position, with a reputation made, he cannot fail to be more easily impartial, and thus owes himself to all.

Voltaire seems to me, judging by his letters, to have busied himself actively during the last years of his life with the public welfare of the region about him, and also with the private interests that, from far and near, appealed to him for help; he pleaded continually with ministers and sub-ministers in behalf of his various colonies, for whatever could give security to their existence and add to their comfort. And this, not only for those around him at Ferney, but for others at a distance, who had trusted themselves to him. He is the benevolent and zealous advocate of more than one good cause. What in earlier years may

have seemed feverish excitement became in the end a noble solicitude for the general interests. This honours his old age; it explains why the world has ended by attaching to his name a fame more real and more grandiose than so much waywardness and inconsistency would seem to warrant.

Madame Du Deffand.

Madame Du Deffand.

OF late many of our classics have been reprinted, and some which are not classics at all. The letters of Mme. Du Deffand, I know not why, have not had that honour. The largest collection of those letters was published for the first time in London, in 1810, from the manuscripts found among the papers of Horace Walpole. This edition was reproduced in Paris in 1811, 1812, and 1824, with some corrections, and also certain *suppressions*. Since then, no one has taken the trouble to reprint the text, purging it, and comparing it with the London edition to restore the parts that were altered or suppressed. Yet Mme. Du Deffand well deserved that care; for she is one of our classics in language and in thought, and one of the most excellent of them. It is this characteristic that I should like to make plain to-day.

I have spoken here of Mme. de Sévigné, and quite recently of Mme. Sand. Between these two women so far apart, so distant, which are the names that really count? that deserve to stand in the first rank of women celebrated for their talent as writers? By the

side of Mme. de Sévigné, with less imagination in her style and less genius for detail, but gifted with a poetic and romantic invention full of tenderness, and an incomparable ease and accuracy of expression, we find Mme. de La Fayette. Then we have Mme. de Maintenon, just mind, sound head, agreeable language, which was perfect within a certain defined circle. At the other extremity of the chain we shall find Mme. de Staël. But between Mme. de Maintenon and Mme. de Staël, what a vacuum! We have, to be sure, Mme. de Staal-Delaunay, author of charming Memoirs, a solid and lofty as well as delicate mind, but she did not live long enough, and, through the circumstances of her early position, she never mingled enough in the full centre of society to personify it to our eyes.

The whole eighteenth century would therefore, we may say, be lacking in this direction, and would be represented in literature only by women of unequal merit and of mixed taste, were it not for Mme. Du Deffand. Mme. Du Deffand belongs, in her origin, to the period of Louis XIV, to the excellent form of language that resulted from it. Born in 1697, dying in 1780, she passed through nearly the whole of the eighteenth century, the bold opinions of which her own mind anticipated while she was still a child. But at no moment during her life was she led away by its infatuations of doctrine, by its metaphysical or sentimental jargon. With Voltaire, she is, in prose,

MARQUISE DU DEFFAND.

After the painting by Chardin.

our purest classic of that epoch, not excepting any one of its great writers.

Born of a noble family of Burgundy, Mlle. de Chamrond received a very irregular and very incomplete education; it was her own mind alone that worked its way. It is related that in a convent of the rue de Charonne, where she was brought up, she early conceived doubts on matters of faith, and spoke of them freely. Her parents sent no less a personage than Massillon to correct her. The great preacher listened, and merely said, as he went away: "She is charming." The abbess insisted on knowing what book she ought to give the child to read. Massillon replied, after a moment's thought: "Give her a five-sous catechism." And they could get nothing further from him. He seemed to despair of her from the first day. Mme. Du Deffand had one peculiarity at least that distinguished her among the free-thinkers of her time, she put no bravado into her opinions; she felt that the philosophy that blazons itself ceases to be philosophy, and she was content to remain in perfect sincerity with herself. When Mlle. Aïssé in dying asked for a confessor, it was Mme. Du Deffand, aided by Mme. de Parabère, who procured him.

Mme. Du Deffand often regretted that she had not had a different education, and cursed the one she had received.

"People often ask themselves," she said, "if they would live their lives again. Oh! I would not be a young girl again on condition of

being brought up as I was, to live with the people with whom I lived, and have the same cast of mind and character that I had; I should have just the same misfortunes over again. But I would willingly go back to four years old to have for tutor a Horace . . . ";

and thereupon she traces a plan of education under an enlightened, well-informed man, such as her friend Horace Walpole. The plan she imagined was serious and noble, but the education which she had given herself, or rather that which she owed to nature and experience, made her an exceptional, and far more original person. What she really was would never have been known, nor what her mind was worth for clearness and rectitude of judgment, if she had not derived all she was from herself. At all times, she was one who least asked her neighbour what she ought to think.

They married her, according to that fine custom, to a man unsuited to her except by birth. She judged him at a first glance, took a dislike to him, left him, tried now and again to live with him, found the annoyance too great, and ended by allowing herself frankly all the misconduct that was prejudicial to respect, even in that society of relaxed and easy morality. In the bloom of her beauty under the Regency she inhaled the spirit of it. She was the mistress of the Regent, and of many others. Going from one disappointment to another, she was always trying to repair her last error by some new experience. Later, in her old age, quite at the close of it, we see

her doing all she can to fill the voids or diversify the monotony of old acquaintances by gaining new ones; she did the same thing with her lovers during the first half of her life.

After a certain period, however, we find her established on a fairly honourable footing of regular *liaison* with President Hénault, a man of intelligence, but incomparably inferior to herself. She accommodates herself to him finally, as sensible persons do in what is called a marriage of reason. About this time (1740) Mme. Du Deffand has a *salon* which becomes a centre. She is intimate with all that is most illustrious in Letters, and in the great world. Long the friend of Voltaire, she is also that of Montesquieu and of d'Alembert. She knows them and judges them in their persons and in their characters more readily than in their writings; she estimates their mind at its source, without devotion to any of them, with perfect independence. If she reads them her judgment is expressed at once and is never checked by any outside consideration. The keenest and most accurate sayings that have survived about the celebrated men of her day were said by her.

The distinctive trait of her mind was to seize upon the truth, the reality of things and of persons, without illusion of any kind. "Is it not intolerable," she said of the factitious society about her, "never to hear the truth?" And then, as if she had been searching for something beyond it, when she discovers that

truth, that reality, she is not satisfied: disgust and *ennui* begin. *Ennui* was her great terror, her dreaded enemy. With an ardent nature beneath her stiff, cold air, she wished to repulse that mortal *ennui* at any cost; it would seem as if she bore within her some nameless instinct that was ever vainly seeking its object.

One of the persons of her society whom she most appreciated was the Duchesse de Choiseul, wife of the minister of Louis XV, a good and virtuous woman, well-conducted and withal charming; who had no other defect in Mme. Du Deffand's eyes than that of being too perfect, and to whom she wrote, one day:

"You say you do not suffer from *ennui*, dear grandmamma" (the name was a jest between them), "and I believe it because you say it. 'Your life' you add 'is not occupied but it is full.' Permit me to tell you what I think: it is that if it were not occupied it would not be full. You have indeed some knowledge of life, but for all that, you lack one experience which I hope you will never have: it is the deprivation of sentiment with the sorrow of not being able to do without it."

Here we touch the profoundly sensitive point in this nature, thought so cold, and which was not so. It is through this feeling of impotence and desire that Mme. Du Deffand makes, in a way, the link between the eighteenth century and ours. Mme. de Maintenon was also a victim to *ennui*, but with her it was not the same, it was far more reasonable. If I did not fear to commit an anachronism of language, I think I

should not commit a moral one by saying that there was in Mme. Du Deffand what was hereafter to be in *Lélia,* but a Lélia without affectation.

She looked about her for that resource that a woman rarely finds in herself and herself only. She sought *another,* or rather she sought no longer. She had vainly hoped to find that other in society where her inexorable eye saw nothing but a collection of absurdities, pretensions, and follies. The men of Letters of her time, when they called themselves Voltaire, Montesquieu, or d'Alembert, amused her fairly well; but in none of them was there enough to satisfy her fully; their atoms and hers never more than half grappled. She had a keen attraction of mind towards the charming Mme. de Staal-Delaunay, whom she lost early. Yet she had one true friend, Formont, one habitual friend, President Hénault, and enough social intimacies to fill to overflowing a less exacting being; but the whole together did little more than slightly amuse her.

During a journey for health which she made in the summer of 1742 to the Baths of Forges, she wrote several letters to President Hénault, receiving a goodly number from him. We have this correspondence, which is curious in tone. Mme. Du Deffand, scarcely arrived at Forges, awaits the president's letters with an eagerness not to be imagined, and from it she deduces proofs of the liking she has for him, lest he should be ignorant of it :

"I see with sorrow that I am as susceptible of *ennui* as of old; but I comprehend that the life I lead in Paris is more agreeable than I thought, and I should be extremely unhappy if I had to renounce it. Conclude from this that you are as necessary to me as life itself, inasmuch as I prefer to be with you than with all the other persons whom I see; this is not a blandishment that I am saying to you, it is a geometrical demonstration that I give you."

To these sweet words of so reasonable a kind, the president responds by gallantries in his style, which is not always very delicate. He gives her news of the Court, and of his own suppers: "My supper was excellent, and, what will surprise you, we all amused ourselves. I own that after it, had I known where to find you, I should have gone in search of you; the weather was fine, the moon was beautiful. . . ." We can fancy how Mme. Du Deffand teased him about the moon; she reduced that flash of sentiment to its due value, and while trying to say a few pleasant words, she gives the key to her whole physical and moral nature: *"Ni tempérament, ni roman,"* she tells him plainly: "Indifference physically, and morally no romance."

Add to the above a consuming activity that knew not how to satisfy itself, and you will begin to comprehend her.

Such she was at the age when the last rays of youth expire. About a dozen years later she began to feel that her sight was gradually failing, and to foresee in the near future a dreadful blindness. Pursued by the idea of solitude and eternal *ennui,* she attempted to

find a companion in Mlle. de Lespinasse. The story is well known: the young companion, after a few years, quarrelled with her patroness, and carried off a part of the latter's circle of friends, d'Alembert at their head. This defection made a great noise, and divided society into two camps. Every one took sides for or against Mlle. de Lespinasse; in general, youth and learning, and the Encyclopædists *en masse,* were for her. What can be said is, that the union could not last between these two women when each put much of herself into it. They both had too much intellect, minds too exacting, and they belonged to two different generations. Mme. Du Deffand represented the century before Jean-Jacques, before the romantic inspiration; her maxim was: "The tone of romance is to passion what copper is to gold." Mlle. de Lespinasse was one of that second half of the century into which romance entered in full force. The divorce, sooner or later, was sure to come.

Mme. Du Deffand, now blind, had an apartment in the convent of Saint-Joseph, rue Saint-Dominique, the same formerly occupied by the foundress, Mme. de Montespan. She was sixty-eight years old; she lived in the great world as if she were not afflicted with the saddest infirmity, forgetting it as much as she could, and striving to make others forget it by force of skill and charm:—rising late, turning night into day, giving suppers at home, or supping out in company, having for intimates President Hénault,

Pont-de-Veyle, the circle of the Choiseuls (to whom she was related), the Maréchales de Luxembourg and de Mirepoix, with many others whom she cared for more or less—this was her life when, in the autumn of 1765, there arrived in Paris an Englishman, highly distinguished for intellect, Horace Walpole. This was the great event, literary and romantic (that, for once, is the right word), of Mme. Du Deffand's life, the one to which we owe her only letters of real feeling and all that makes us know her best.

This blind old woman fell in love, instantly, with the keen, bold, delicate, and brilliant mind of Horace Walpole, cut out on a pattern she had not seen for fifty years. She perceived in him the qualities proper to a man so distinguished in himself, and also those of the powerful race to which he belonged: she was grateful for them all; and she who had never loved with love, who had had caprices only and no romance, who, in the matter of friendship, could count but three serious ones in her whole life,—Formont and two women, one of whom had deceived her,—she, this moralist of satirical temper, became suddenly tender, emotional as well as amused, full of active, passionate solicitude; she no longer belonged to herself. In short, blind and sixty-eight years of age, she gave her heart, and this time (for the rarity of the thing) she gave it to an Englishman, much distinguished and welcomed by society, a man of fifty, whose mother she could very well have been, whose life was lived

away from her, and whom she greatly embarrassed by her vivacious tenderness. So true is it that she was destined, as some one said, to be wise in judgment, and always foolish in conduct.

But as for me, I do not think it folly; for it shows a noble side in Mme. Du Deffand, which uplifts her, and proves that while she had economised her sensibility until then, she was not without it, and was even capable of passion. In fact, if we pardon Mme. de Sévigné for having loved her daughter to idolatry, we must also pardon Mme. Du Deffand for having felt for Walpole a passion one knows not how to qualify, which entered through her mind into her heart, and was fervent, lofty, and pure.

The first time that Horace Walpole saw her in Paris, he wrote of her to one of his friends (October 6, 1765). After a few details as to his own variations of humour and impressions since his arrival, he goes on to say:

"I now begin, in English fashion, to claim the right of doing as I please. I laugh, I say what comes into my head, and I oblige others to listen to me. There are two or three houses in which I am wholly on that footing. . . . I pay no tribute to their great authors of the day. Every woman here has two or three who never budge from her salon. . . . Old President Hénault is the pagod in that of Mme. Du Deffand, a blind old woman, a debauchee of mind, with whom I supped last night. The president is almost completely deaf and has more than run his course."

In writing thus he little thought that she whom he called "a debauchee of mind" was to feel for himself

a true passion of the mind, and that this passion in her would become a passion of the heart, perhaps the only one she had ever experienced, which would last fifteen years, as living on the last day as on the first.

Except for a certain number of letters of Mme. Du Deffand to Horace Walpole, and from Voltaire to her, by far the longest "Correspondence" of hers that we possess is one that passed regularly between three persons: Mme. Du Deffand herself, the Duchesse de Choiseul, and the Abbé Barthélemy. The Duc de Choiseul does not appear in it, except by a few very short notes, but there is mention of him in nearly every letter.

The correspondence, begun in May, 1761, during the great days of M. de Choiseul's ministry, is continuous and lasts without interruption or slackening till August 20, 1780, one month before Mme. Du Deffand's death. It becomes very eager and animated after the fall of the Duc de Choiseul and his exile to Chanteloup. It may even be said that we do not know the life at Chanteloup and that triumphant exile, or form a just and complete idea of it until we have read these letters, which are like a confidential bulletin, in which the enthusiasm of intimate friends and interested persons never weakens for a moment.

The new element in this "Correspondence" is the Duchesse de Choiseul, whom we already knew for her mixture of grace and good sense through the universal testimony of her contemporaries, but never to

the degree in which her natural self is shown in this series of lively, witty, sensible, serious, even logical letters, and impassioned, too, whenever the fame and interests of her husband are in question. The Abbé Barthélemy, the guest of Chanteloup, the friend who has given himself once for all ; and whom the spell has irrevocably bound, also appears to advantage, and is seen in all the aspects of his character, the most polished of learned men, amiable and estimable, gay and moderate, a "good fellow," all things to all men, a social treasure, having hours, however, when he regrets, under his breath, the independence of his former life, and the free delights of study.

The one who gains least is Mme. Du Deffand ; and yet, all things considered, she does not lose, for, as the intelligent editor of the "Correspondence" remarks, she appears such as her well-wishers liked to see her, "less sensible than affectionate, and more discouraged than incapable of loving others or herself." She is full of *ennui;* she judges herself, and more severely than is needed ; she distrusts others, but, above all, herself ; she does not think it possible that any one can truly love her: at the most she admits they endure her. "I cannot be a burden to you," she repeats incessantly to Mme. de Choiseul, who wants her to stay at Chanteloup : "I cannot contribute to pleasure or to amusement ; I should owe it to your goodness, —I will say the word—to your compassion, to suffer me near you !" She was only half mistaken : the

Duchesse de Choiseul, in sending, later, this collection of letters to M. Beausset (the future Cardinal), said: "The letters of Mme. Du Deffand have the charm of naturalness, the choicest expressions, and depth of sentiment in *ennui*. Poor woman! I still pity her." *Pity*, that was the feeling she inspired. "Poor woman!" are still the words that come most naturally to our minds after reading her letters; but we ought instantly to add: "clear and upright judgment, excellent mind, language still more excellent."

Mme. de Choiseul was sketched by Horace Walpole in a few strokes that are indeed those of a painter who was the compatriot of Spencer and of Shakespeare:

"My last new passion, and also, I think, the strongest," he writes during a visit to Paris (January, 1766), "is the Duchesse de Choiseul. Her face is pretty but not very pretty; her person is a little model. Gay, modest, full of attentions, with the happiest propriety of expression and the greatest vivacity of reason and of judgment, you might take her for the Queen of an Allegory. A lover, if she was the sort of woman to have one, might desire that the allegory should end, but as for us, we say: Let it never end!"

And again, in a subsequent letter:

"The Duchesse de Choiseul is not very pretty, but she has fine eyes; she is a little wax model, who, for some time, was not allowed to talk, being thought incapable of it, and having both shyness and modesty. The Court has not cured her of modesty; her shyness is redeemed by the most touching tones of voice, and is soon forgotten in the elegant turn and exquisite propriety of her expressions. Oh! she is indeed the most dainty, the most lovable, the most gracious little being that ever issued from a fairy's egg. So true in her words, in her thoughts; so considerate, so kindly by nature! Every one loves her, except her husband, who prefers his own sister, the Duchesse de

Grammont, a tall amazon, proud, haughty, who loves and hates according to her caprices, and is detested. Mme. de Choiseul, passionately in love with her husband, has been the martyr of this preference; she has ended by submitting with a good grace; she has gained some influence over him in consequence, and is thought still to adore him.—But I suspect," adds Walpole, "that she takes too much pains to make it believed."

In this Walpole was mistaken. The attitude of Mme. de Choiseul was in accordance with the truth; she continued very sincerely, very tenderly, in love with the man of whom she was proud, of whom she said that not only was he "the best of men but the greatest that the century had produced," and of whom she wrote one day, with charming artlessness: "It seems to me that he is beginning to be less ashamed of me; and it is a great point gained no longer to wound the self-love of those by whom we want to be loved." She had reason to congratulate herself on the exile to Chanteloup, and was, perhaps the only one fully to enjoy its brilliant peace; she saw in it the means of keeping near her the object of her worship and, if not to reconquer him wholly, at least to possess him, to hold him in her hand, and not to lose sight of him for a single day.

One fundamental pleasantry runs through this "Correspondence," and gives the tone to it. Mme. Du Deffand had had a grandmother, who had married, as her second husband, a Duc de Choiseul; she had had, therefore, a Duchesse de Choiseul as a "grandmamma." Born herself some thirty-five or forty years

before the present Duchesse de Choiseul, she amused herself by inverting the rôles and the ages, calling the duke and the duchess "grandpapa" and "grandmamma," while they called her their "granddaughter." That is the alpha and omega of all their letters; it is the pretext for much pretty jesting and childish nonsense when there was nothing better to write about.

Would you see a Duchesse de Choiseul at Versailles, as the wife of a prime minister, in grand toilet and in all her pomp; courted, surrounded, wearied with homage and civilities, without a moment to herself, and trying to describe to her "granddaughter" at odd moments her hurried morning, her crowded day?—Mme. Du Deffand had spoken to her in one letter of certain persons from Versailles whom she saw in Paris, and with whom she had promised to have Mme. de Choiseul sup on her next visit to Paris; this is the answer:

"Spare me, my dear child, those Versailles people; it is now, as you truly say, five months that I have been here. . . . The more people you invite, the more I shall be hindered from seeing you—I am hindered now in the pleasure of writing to you; I am made desperate. I have just torn myself out of bed to have the dressing of my hair—begun yesterday—finished: four heavy hands are on my poor head. And that is not the worst for it—I hear tongs at my ears, and curl-papers—it is too hot! . . . 'What jewels will Madame put on to-day?' . . . 'Those go best with such or such a gown.' . . . 'Angélique, bring the headdress'—'Marianne, prepare the panier'—You understand that it is the supreme authority, Tintin, who gives these orders. She has had much trouble in cleaning my watch with an old glove; she now wants me to see that the inside is still black. But that is not all: a soldier perorates

about the expulsion of the Jesuits; two doctors are talking, I believe, about war—or else they are making it on each other; an archbishop is showing me an architectural decoration; this one wants to attract my eyes, that other one to occupy my mind, and all to obtain my attention: you alone interest my heart.—They are calling to me from the next room: 'Madame! it has struck the three-quarters; the king will be going to Mass'—Quick! quick! my cap, my hood, my muff, my fan, my book! I must not scandalise any one; quick! my chair, my porters, and off we go!—I return from Mass; a woman, a friend of mine, comes in as soon as I do. She is in full-dress; my very little cabinet is filled up with the *vastitude* of her hoop. She tells me to continue what I am doing: 'I cannot, madame; I would not be so much my own enemy as to deprive myself of the pleasure of seeing you and listening to you. . . . At last she is gone! I resume my letter—but here they come to say that the courier to Paris is just starting, has Madame any commands? 'Oh, yes, yes! I am just writing to my dear child; tell him to wait.' Here a little Irish girl comes and solicits me to procure her a favour, which I shall not obtain for her; a manufacturer from Tours comes to thank me for a benefit I did not procure for him. Some one is presenting to me his brother, whom I do not see; there is no one, down to Mademoiselle Fels [a famous opera singer] who does not come here to see me.—

"I hear the drums: the chairs in my antechamber are knocked over, the officers of the Swiss guard rush into the courtyard.

"The *maître d'hôtel* comes to ask if I wish dinner to be served; he informs me that the salon is full of people, that Monsieur has come in and demands dinner. Well, well, I must end. There is the exact picture of what I experienced yesterday and to-day in writing to you—and at nearly all times. Judge if I am not weary of people, and whether you ought to give yourself the trouble to procure me more; judge also how I love you to keep on writing to you, and how provoked, out of patience, pulled about, and harassed your poor grandmamma is! Pity her, love her, and you will console her for all."

But this is only the great lady in the days of her ministerial state; I prefer her in her later days of tranquillity and active good sense. It is worth while then to hear this pretty little person, this pretty thing, with her dainty wax face, grow animated, and talk of

public affairs, literature, authors, Rousseau, Voltaire, the Empress Catherine, putting them all in their true light; talking, descanting (for she does descant now and then when she feels at her ease, and it is, perhaps, a fault); we ought to hear her in such moments become indignant, rebellious, breathing forth fire and flame; she has no hesitation then, nor any shyness; she says all she thinks, all she has in her heart; her reflections overflow like a restrained passion. She is a marvel to Mme. Du Deffand and the "great abbé," and as for us, she amazes us. She has maxims, principles, which contrast with her period, with her youth, with her childlike air:

"Let us above all," she says, "distrust those who oppose themselves with such rancour against what they call the prejudices adopted in society. If they would examine societies, they would see that laws can foresee and be enacted against actual things only; they may be the terror of criminals and the curb on crimes, but prejudices are the only curb on morals. Now governments are founded equally on morals and on laws; destroy either the one or the other, and you overthrow the edifice. . . .

"The employment of the mind to the injury of public order is one of the greatest wickednesses, because, by its nature, it is the most unpunishable, or the most unpunished; yet it is the most dangerous, because the coil it produces is extended and promulgated by the very penalty inflicted on the guilty, and for centuries after. That species of crime is a seed sown; it is the tares of the Gospel.

"A true citizen will serve his country best by his mind and by his talents, but he will not write on the social contract in a way to make us doubt the legitimacy of Governments, and to load us with chains the weight of which we have never yet felt. I have always mistrusted that Rousseau, with his singular systems, his extraordinary accoutrements, and his pulpit of eloquence perched on the roofs of houses; he has always seemed to me the charlatan of virtue."

Mme. Du Deffand was shocked by a passage in an article by Fréron, in which he spoke "insolently" of Horace Walpole in relation to Walpole's mystifying letter to Jean-Jacques. She complained to her "grandpapa," then prime minister, in order that he might castigate Fréron; at which Horace Walpole, when he heard of it was much annoyed: "We love so much the liberty of the press," he wrote, "that I would rather be maltreated by it than see it suppressed." All that Fréron had done, moreover, was to report a book translated from the English; there was no other blame that could be laid on him; "In strict justice," said M. de Choiseul, "it is the censor who did wrong and not Fréron; however, they shall both be corrected." Mme. de Choiseul had been set to work on this affair, but she soon felt that she had better be involved as little as possible in such squabbles, in which plenty of others took pleasure:

"Let us not thrust ourselves into literary quarrels, my dear child," she writes; "if we did so at first, it was only to pull your friend out, and not to mingle in it ourselves; such quarrels are good for nothing but to depreciate talent and bring to light absurdities. But—between ourselves be it said—it ought to be rather pleasant for us to see the tyrants of our opinions destroying each other by the same arguments they use to subjugate our minds. That is the surest way to enable us to escape their dominion while profiting by their lights."

Mme. Du Deffand was really of the same opinion. Since the defection of Mlle. de Lespinasse, who had withdrawn from her, carrying with her certain of the leaders of the Encyclopædists, she was much opposed

to whatever resembled partisan interests either in philosophy or in literature. But as Voltaire, with malicious pleasure, tried to provoke Walpole and bring him, by pique or by prodding, to a discussion on the merits of Racine and Shakespeare, and as, moreover, he seemed in the humour to wrangle with the two ladies on the subject of La Bletterie, whom they protected and he disliked, Mme. de Choiseul wrote again to her old friend:

"I think that we should do well to let him alone; as for me, I do not want to enter upon a literary dispute; I do not feel myself in a condition to make head against Voltaire. Besides, the animadversion of men of Letters seems to me more dangerous than the plague. I like Letters, I honour those who make them a profession, but I desire their society only in their books; I find them good to see in their portraits only.—I hear the granddaughter saying: 'Grandmamma is right; she seems to have all my experience.' Admit, dear child, that none of them, except our very dear and good abbè, is without venom; he is, because he keeps his superiority for himself, his fine mind for us, and his kind spirit for everybody. But he fears men of Letters as much as we do."

Thus Mme. de Choiseul and Mme. Du Deffand united their sentiments of prudence and propriety in this matter, making no exception among literary men, except for their wise and gentle Anacharsis.

The younger of the two was full of good, practical advice, and she gave it without making it unsavoury; she relieved it by a vivacious turn of expression, that justifies the eulogy of Horace Walpole:

"Chanteloup, May 17, 1767. You tell me of your sadness with the greatest gaiety, and of your *ennui* in the most amusing fashion. Do you also make courage for yourself, dear child? That is the best

thing to make when we have not any. Between *making* and *having* there is a long way; yet it is only by dint of making that we ever acquire any. Oh! how much I have made in my life! *Make courage* is not, I know, a French expression; but I must speak my own language before that of my nation; we often owe the irregularity of our expressions to that of our thoughts—we have to render them such as they are. . . . From all this, I gather that you are ill and full of *ennui;* this grieves me. You are sad because you are ill and ennuyéd, and you are ill because you are sad and ennuyéd. Sup less, open your windows, drive out in a carriage, appreciate people and things. So doing, you will love less, but you will hate less; you will not have great enjoyments, neither will you meet with great disappointments; and you will no longer be sad, ill, and weary with *ennui.* Write to me always in your sad moments; it will be a distraction. Do not fear to make me share your *ennui;* I shall share your feelings only; and mine will be infinitely tender for you."

I may be mistaken, but this letter seems to me in a tone wholly modern, more modern than that of Mme. Du Deffand. It is essentially new and distinguished. Such a letter might have been written from 1800 to 1820 by a Mme. de Beaumont, or a Duchesse de Duras, by one of those women of heart and thought who were no longer of the eighteenth century.

The dismissal came: the Duc de Choiseul was exiled to Chanteloup; we know with what honour. Seeing such evidence of public esteem and favour, the heart of the duchess is filled with feelings of pride, satisfaction, and conjugal delight; she overflows, her measure is full, she is proud; she extols the happy exile—happy at least for her,—she would not reduce it in any way; the exercise of power seems to her less enviable, less sweet. And when fears are expressed that these popular manifestations might irritate the

duke's enemies, and perhaps provoke more severity, she replies:

"What more do you expect them to do to us? the king never strikes twice. . . . Terror has attacked our friends to such a point that some of them fear the public interest will be embittered against us. Let it be embittered! in the meantime, if further harm is attempted against us, it will be the public interest that holds it back; they dare not; there would be general revolt. Let that interest go on; it is too flattering to us to deprive us of it. Let it be perpetuated, if possible. It secures the fame of my husband; it rewards him for twelve years of toil and anxiety; he has bought it with his services; it might cost even a higher price and yet we should not feel that we had paid too highly for the immense happiness, and of a new kind, which we have caused France to enjoy. M. de Choiseul feels this; as for me, I own my head is turned by it. . . ."

Thus we see her heroically elating herself for her lord and master; all his interests are hers; she embraces them without reserve, without calculation; she exaggerates his fame; she sees him pure and spotless; if any one holds back, if they do not grant all, or if they seem to compromise with the inimical powers, she is provoked to anger, she is like a lion—above all, and before all, she is a woman, honestly coquettish, tender, assiduous, showing herself in love, as on the first day, with the man who, until then, had certainly not made too much of her, and to whom, more than ever, she now consecrates herself:

"Chanteloup, January, 1771. . . . You wish me to tell you all I feel, all I do, all I experience! I have no longer those feelings of suffocation, the journey has absolutely cured them. I did not take cold. Our rooms are beginning to get warm, thanks to paper stuffing the chinks of all the windows, and sheepskins round all the doors. Our chimneys, too, begin to smoke rather less. . . . We have

pretty good food; we pass our nights tranquilly, and our mornings in adorning ourselves in pearls and diamonds like princesses of romance. I have never had my hair so well dressed or thought so much of my adornment as I do now. I want to be young again, and, if possible, pretty! I shall try at any rate to make the grandpapa think I am both, and as he will have few objects of comparison, I shall manage it more easily."

Mme. de Grammont, nevertheless, was there, and shared habitually the same exile. But here, from the first day, yielding to a generous emotion, the rivalry was disarmed, and without altogether ignoring its cause they worked in concert to soften the exile of the fortunate mortal for whom, the very day before, they were at arms. The treaty of peace which Mme. de Choiseul signed with her sister-in-law, at a first interview, in presence of her husband, the conditions she laid down, the limits she clearly established around her in her own house, as a devoted wife and the accomplished mistress of a household, all show the action of a very firm, very delicate person, perfectly gentle and without temper, but who chooses to be reckoned with, a woman capable of more than one sacrifice that does not concern dignity. This agreement, we must add, was very well observed on both sides; tact, good taste, and knowledge of the world prevented difficulties in the beginning, and in the long run Mme. de Grammont ended by winning something not only of the esteem but even of the affection of her whom she had so long distressed. If we were still sensitive to these subtleties of the old society, I should say that

we were witnessing, veritably, the triumph of its manners.

We can gather from these letters a description in fullest detail, of an ideal ministerial exile in the eighteenth century. Chanteloup, seen through the eyes of Mme. de Choiseul, or through those of the good abbé, was an Eden. But the agreeable incidents that occurred to enliven it and to diversify the scene disappear for us before grave reflections. What illusion in this intoxication! in this long ovation over a fall, in which fashion played at popularity; in this hope, secretly nourished and ever present, of a future recall, and a triumphant return to the head of affairs! What illusion in that fame which they believed to be eternal, in that building, costing forty thousand *écus,* erected at the extremity of the artificial lake, a true pagoda, on the marble walls of which were carved the names of all who visited Chanteloup during those four years, with this inscription made by the Abbé Barthélemy:

"Étienne-François, Duc de Choiseul,
Deeply touched by the testimonies of friendship,
Kindness and attention
With which he was honoured during his exile
By a vast number of persons who hastened
To come to him in this place,
Has caused this building to be erected
To eternalise his gratitude."

How small that ministerial obelisk, inaugurated ten years before the French Revolution, at a few steps from the volcano that was about to engulf the monarchy,

how small, seen from afar, it looks, and how it misses its effect in the perspective!—unless, indeed, we regard it simply as a domestic chapel, dedicated by a loving and enthusiastic woman to her worship of her husband.

Let me add here that Mme. de Choiseul, on the death of her husband in 1785, retired to the Convent of the Récolettes, to enable her to pay the enormous debts that he left and thus do honour to his memory. During the last years of her life she lived in the rue Saint-Dominique, in a house afterwards occupied by Maréchal Soult. One day, during the Directorate, or the Consulate (for she did not die till 1801), M. Pasquier, going to see her, found her much agitated. He asked her the cause, fearing it was some bad news:

"No, not that," she answered. "But just now they told me that a man from Chanteloup was there, and wished to see me. I told them to bring him in. I saw a tall man, neatly dressed, who asked me if I recognised him: 'Do you not remember, Madame la duchesse, little Pierre who picked up stones on the road, and to whom you were so good because, when you passed, you saw he put his heart into his work? Well, I am little Pierre. You asked me one day what I needed to set me up in business; and you bought me a donkey and a cart. That brought me luck. I worked, I made my way. I am now a contractor for roads. Do you know I am one of the first men in my region. I am rich. But, Madame la duchesse, all that belongs to you; they tell me you are not well off. I have come to return to you what is yours.'"

The emotion of Mme. de Choiseul in relating the little story was too much for her; tears choked her voice.

The Abbé Barthélemy, as I said before, gains by the publication of these letters, of which a goodly number are from him. It is true that his descriptions seem in these days rather long and tiresome, his grand chronicles of Chanteloup dull and long-winded, his jokes stiff and starched: it needs a magic of the pen, which he lacks, to make us find pleasure in the monotony of those, to him, happy days. Let me say, to be just, that it was not for us that he wrote, but for the persons of his coterie, who found all he said very good, very kind, and very amusing. But, when we enter into the spirit of this correspondence with the two distinguished women whose union he cemented and sustained, we cannot fail to estimate at his true value this essential friend, this equable and safe character, compliant without baseness, agreeable and serviceable without flattery. A true sentiment, conceived early, and nourished by him for thirty years, chained him to the feet of his noble friend, Mme. de Choiseul. I know not whether, like Walpole, he began by taking her for a Queen of Allegory; but he was certainly patient, for he seems never to have wished that the golden mists should part, or the allegory vanish.

One day, however, when Mme. Du Deffand, with the curiosity of a bored woman, questions him rather closely as to his private sentiments, as to how he stands with Mme. de Grammont, and how he governs himself between her and Mme. de Choiseul, he

goes, in his reply, rather beyond the meaning and bearing of her letter, and adds, after a few explanations:

". . . This is all that I can say to you on the subject. I am greatly touched by the curiosity you express to me about it; it can come only from the interest you feel in me, and that interest will be satisfied with my reply; for, if you put aside the favourable prepossessions you have for me, you will see that I am very fortunate in being so well treated. In the main, I am not agreeable; thus I am not fitted to live in society; circumstances, which I did not seek, tore me from my study, where I had long lived, known to a few friends, infinitely happy because I had a passion for work, and because a rather flattering success in my own line promised me greater still. Chance brought me to know the grandpapa and the grandmamma; the feelings that I vowed to them led me astray from my career. You know to what a point I am penetrated with their goodness to me; but you do not know that in sacrificing to them my time, my obscurity, my peaceful life, and, above all, the reputation I might have won in my profession, I made them the greatest sacrifices of which I was capable: sometimes they come into my mind and then I suffer cruelly. But as, on the other hand, the cause is a noble one, I put aside such ideas as best I can, and let myself be carried along by destiny. I beg you to burn this letter. I have been led to open my heart to you by the marks of friendship and kindness with which your letter is filled. Do not attempt to comfort me; assuredly I am not to be pitied. I know so well the value of what I possess that I would give my life not to lose it. In God's name, let nothing transpire of all this; neither in your letters nor in your conversations with the grandmamma; she would be grieved if she suspected that I still regretted some things. Do not be grieved for me yourself; for these regrets of mine are not of long continuance, and I feel daily that they grow less keen. It is not so with the sentiments that attach me to you."

If the Abbé Barthélemy received much from his noble friends, he brought them much of his own in return; he sacrificed to them more than he let them see; he was aware of it, yet he kept it secret within himself: all that honours him.

Mme. Du Deffand, as we feel in the midst of our impatience, and even of our smiles, at her perpetual lamentations, had, in general, one merit — she was *true*. She shows herself to us as she was, not seeking to embellish herself; she does herself justice, or blame, but does not flatter herself. Always doubting and distrusting that she is loved, she has the desire to be. At her advanced age, she still kept burning, as in her earliest years, the *thirst for happiness*, and she knows no means of quenching it. When we consider her in her relations with Horace Walpole and with the Choiseuls, we see her on her best side, the side to which she clings in her endeavour to love. There are moments when she flatters herself that at last she is loved, and then she cries out: "I enjoy a happiness I have always desired, but have come near to thinking a pure chimera: *I am loved*—by you and by my Horace. . . ." But these moments are rare and soon pass; they give place to long periods of hardness and sterility. At such times she wants to know what others think of her at bottom; whether they love her truly, and in what manner: "You *know* that you love me," she says to Mme. de Choiseul, "but you *do not feel* it."

She seems convinced of the truth of that terrible and cruel maxim, which others besides her have professed to believe and for which Christianity alone can supply the corrective or the remedy, namely: "To know a human being truly to the depths of his nature,

and to love him, is an impossibility." Nothing said or done reassured her, nothing changed that belief. In vain did Mme. de Choiseul try to instil into her mind her own excellent precepts of practical wisdom: "In the matter of happiness, we ought not to question the 'why' and the 'wherefore'; the best way and the safest is to take it as it comes. It is only evil in which we should search for causes and for the means of pulling out the thorn that wounds us." Nothing availed. They invited her to Chanteloup; they assured her of the pleasure she would give, of their happiness in having her; she dares not believe it; she lacks *faith* in friendship as in everything else. The abbé preached to her, and there is a very pretty letter of his, written from Chanteloup, on the 2nd of February, 1771; it begins abruptly in these words:

"The other day, one of our Franciscan Friars from Amboise preached on the cardinal virtues, and here is an extract from his sermon:

"'Without faith, hope, and charity there is no salvation in this world, nor in the other. Let us begin with the two latter, which we know best, because they are nearest to us. Everybody knows the force of hope and of love; but what can those virtues do without faith, without the confidence which is their foundation?

"'My dear Brethren, examples will convince you better than reasons. If a little girl, far from her parents, wrote to them: "I hope to go and see you; that hope makes me happy, because I love you as much as any one can love; but I fear I shall not seem to you lovable"; her parents would answer her: "Why do you doubt that we should love you, inasmuch as you would not have us doubt that you love us?" Are you ignorant that charity, according to Saint Paul, covers a multitude of sins? Are you ignorant that Saint Augustine said: Love, and all shall be forgiven you? Are you ignorant that persons do really displease when they are always fearing to displease? Distrust

poisons and destroys feelings; it is not a work of nature. Look at children; see with what frankness they love. If they do wrong, they are whipped; but at your first caresses they will fling themselves into your arms. Do you know why, dear Brethren? Because they trust; they do not calculate. Reason invented calculation, hence suspicions, fears, false interpretations. Instinct knows neither principles, nor consequences, nor errors; it is by instinct that we truly love and are loved. Trust to that, my very dear Brethren; that will guide you better where feelings are concerned than all the great arguments of philosophers, the deceitful experience of the world, or the dangerous sophistries of your own reason'. . . .

"The good Friar said more, but I came away, because he began to tire me, and my instinct tells me not to bear *ennui*:—but I thought I saw in his discourse a few truths applicable to the granddaughter."

It was thus they treated the sick old child, who had so abused and misused in youth the faculty of loving that she no longer had the force or the faith of love in her last days: but it was at least something, better than nothing, to have kept the desire and its torture. She said of herself, comparing that self with Mme. de Sévigné, and humbling herself in the comparison (this time it is to Horace Walpole that she writes):

"You find, you say, my letters very short. You do not like me to speak to you of myself; I weary you when I communicate my thoughts, my reflections; you are right; they are always very sad. If I tell you about this or that person, what interest could you take in them? Unfortunately, I am not like Mme. de Sévigné in anything; I am not moved by things that are nothing to me. Everything interested her, and warmed her imagination; mine is iced. I am sometimes animated, but only for a moment; that moment gone, all that brightened me is so effaced that even the memory of it is lost."

It is not for us to take pleasure in adding our commentary to hers and crushing her with the presence of Mme. de Sévigné:—Yes, Mme. de Sévigné had

indeed received from a fairy at her birth *Imagination*, that magic gift, that golden horn of plenty ; but, more than that, she had known how to control her life and her feelings.

Curious without interest, eager for the new without hope of better, tired of all things without ceasing to be agitated, Mme. Du Deffand wrote one day to Mme. de Choiseul : "What think you of the new minister (M. de Saint-Germain)? I remember how often I heard the late Mme. de Staal say : 'I am charmed to make new acquaintances ; I always hope they will be worth more than the old ones ; I am at least certain they cannot be worse.'" To which Mme. de Choiseul replied, as if poison had been presented to her : "Your quotation from Mme. de Staal is a horror to me. I am far from thinking as she did ; it seems to me that I am not dissatisfied with any of my acquaintances, and I am enchanted with my friends."

Those words issued from a healthy soul. Mme. de Choiseul has indeed the honours of this correspondence. Her name should be added to the list of women who have thought well and written well. She is one conquest the more won by literature from the old French society.

I have lately studied very closely the relation between Mme. Du Deffand and Horace Walpole, and I think that, in general, justice has not been done to either of them. In Walpole people have seen only

the fear he felt of incurring the ridicule of a most satirical society through this proclaimed passion of a blind old woman ; and as for Mme. Du Deffand, we judge her too much as did Grimm, Marmontel, the whole Encyclopædic clique, through whom the tradition about her has come down to us. We judge her too much as if we were on the side of her enemy, Mlle. de Lespinasse, or on that of Mme. Geoffrin. The true, deep, and serious judgment on Mme. Du Deffand, in this matter, ought to be formed from the "Letters of Horace Walpole"; for Walpole, in spite of his harshness, more apparent than real, appreciated his old friend at her true value, and admired her extremely. He returned many times to Paris expressly to see her. In a letter addressed to the poet Gray, written in January, 1766, three months after the one I have previously quoted, he says, in describing delightfully the two rival figures of Mme. Geoffrin and Mme. Du Deffand :

"Her great enemy, Mme. Du Deffand, was for a time the mistress of the Regent ; she is now very old and blind ; but she retains all her vivacity, wit, memory, judgment, and charm. She goes to the Opera, to the theatre, to suppers, and to Versailles ; she gives two suppers a-week, has all the new books read to her, writes songs and epigrams that are truly admirable, and remembers all that has been done in that line for eighty years. She corresponds with Voltaire, dictates delightful letters to him, contradicts him, is not bigoted for him, nor for any one, and laughs at Clergy and philosophers alike. In discussion, to which she inclines readily, she is full of warmth, yet she is very seldom in the wrong. Her judgment on every subject is as correct as possible ; but on all points of conduct she is as much mistaken as any one can be ; for she is all love and all aversion, ardent to enthusi-

asm for her friends, always anxious that they should love her and concern themselves with her ; a violent enemy, but frank."

In this first portrait, to which Walpole added, later, many a touch of his brush, we can see a Mme. Du Deffand far more living and animated than she has usually been painted.

Walpole quitted Paris April 17, 1766, after a stay of seven months, and Mme. Deffand wrote to him on the 19th. She had received a letter from him the evening before, written especially to urge her to secrecy and prudence. Why such prudence? it may be asked. Because there was then a secret chamber where letters were unsealed, and a too tender, too ardent letter from an old woman of seventy might go to the king, to the Court, amuse the courtiers, and make this rather singular intercourse the topic of satirical couplets, such as Mme. Du Deffand herself knew so well how to write. Walpole would not willingly subject himself to that. Mme. Du Deffand was better inured to it. "You say that people are laughing at us," she writes, "but here they laugh at everything, and do not think of it the next instant." This fear on the part of Walpole returns perpetually; he restrains his old friend as much as he can; he rallies her for being "romantic," "sentimental"; he piques her by taxing her with metaphysics, which she abhors above everything. She replies with anger, with submission, with sentiment. She persists in returning constantly to the topic he forbids, to that constant thought which is

for him alone. If he is ill, if he does not write often enough, she threatens him, gaily, with the most violent measures:

"Take notice," she says, "that it is not letters that I exact; simply bulletins; if you refuse me this kindness, I shall instantly say to Viart (her secretary): 'Start! take your boots, and go, at one flight, to London; proclaim in all the streets that you come from me, that you have orders to live near Horace Walpole, who is my guardian, that I am his ward, that I have for him an unbridled passion, and that I shall, perhaps, arrive myself directly, and settle at Strawberry Hill; in short, there is no scandal I am not willing to cause.

"Ah! my guardian, quick! get a bottle of salts; are you fainting? This, however, is what will happen if I do not hear from you twice a week."

Here, of course, she is jesting, but at other times she is sad, bitter, and casts a despairing glance on life:

"*Ah, mon Dieu!* you are right enough! what an abominable, detestable thing is friendship! where did it come from? to what does it lead? on what is it founded? what good can we expect or hope to get from it? What you have said to me is true; then why are we on this earth? above all, why should we live to grow old? . . . Last evening I wondered much at a numerous company who came to see me; men and women seemed to me machines with springs that made them go and come, talk and laugh, without thinking, without reflecting, without feeling; each played his or her rôle from habit: Mme. la Duchesse d'Aiguillon laughed convulsively; Mme. de Forcalquier disdained everybody; Mme. de La Vallière jabbered about everything. The men played no better parts; and I, myself, was sunk in the blackest reflections; I thought how I had spent my life in illusions; how I had dug for myself all the abysses into which I had fallen; how all my judgments had been false and rash, and always too hasty; how, in short, I had never truly known any one; that I had never, moreover, been known by any one, and that, possibly, I did not know myself. We desire a support, we let ourselves be charmed by the hope that we have found one; it is a dream; a dream which circumstances soon dispel, and on which they have the effect of an awakening."

We have the two tones. The last tone, that is to say, the serious and penetrating one, the one that goes to the bottom of everything, is not rare in the letters of Mme. Du Deffand to Walpole. He, good Englishman that he is, in spite of his flashes of French wit, makes her read Shakespeare; which she instantly enjoys, crying out, as if on the discovery of a new world: "Oh! I admire your Shakespeare. I read 'Othello' yesterday, and I have just read 'Henry VI.' I cannot express to you the effect those plays have had upon me; they have resuscitated me." She, too, in her way, sees into the depths like Shakespeare; in her 64th Letter I find what I call her Hamlet monologue. I invite the inquirer to read the passage that begins with these words: "Tell me why, detesting life, I fear death." . . . and ends thus: "I own that a dream would be better." An English critic, at the time when these Letters were published in London, remarked, very justly, that Mme. Du Deffand seemed to combine in the character of her mind something of the qualities of the two nations: the charm and liveliness of the one, with the boldness and vigorous judgment of the other.

What she liked first of all in Walpole was his freedom of thought and of judgment. She loved truth above all else, and that people should be truly themselves. The taste of her time disgusted her: "What people call eloquence to-day has become to me so odious that I would prefer the language of the markets;

by dint of searching for wit they smother it." Her literary judgments, which must have seemed excessively severe at the time, are nearly all confirmed to-day. "That Saint-Lambert," she said, "has a cold, tasteless, false mind; he thinks he abounds in ideas, but he is sterility itself." What she said of Saint-Lambert, she says, with variations, of many others. How she *selects* in Voltaire! how she distinguishes in him the good from the second-rate; that which came from the living spring from mere idle repetitions [*rabâchage*]. She does the same with Jean-Jacques: "Not knowing what to read, I have gone back to Rousseau's *Héloïse;* there are very good parts in it, but they are drowned in an ocean of eloquent verbiage." On Racine, on Corneille, she passes sound and correct judgments. There is only one work that she would like to have written; one only, because it seems to her to have attained, in all respects, to perfection; and that is *Athalie.* It was said of Mme. Du Deffand that in the matter of reading "she denied herself nothing but the necessary." The saying is witty but shallow. Undoubtedly, she did not have a solid foundation of regular, systematic reading. As she was not told in advance what she ought to admire, she had only her own clear opinion, her honest and luminous instinct, and they usually guided her aright.

"You English," she writes to Walpole, "you subject yourselves to no rule, no method; you let genius grow, without constraining it to take this or that form; you would have all the intellect you have, if no one had had any before you. Oh! *we* are not like that; we have

books; some on the art of thinking; others on the art of speaking, writing, comparing, judging, etc."

But if here she seems to flatter Walpole and to espouse the taste of his nation, she does not always compliment him, and she knows at need how to oppose him. She stands firm for Montaigne, whom Walpole did not like; she is amazed at that, and gives him her reasons in many places:

"I am very sure that you could accustom yourself to Montaigne; one finds in him all that one has ever thought; and no style is more energetic. He teaches nothing, because he decides nothing; it is the very opposite of dogmatism. He is vain—Hey! all men are, are they not? and those who seem modest, are not they doubly vain? The *I* and the *me* are on every line; but how should we ever have any knowledge except through the *I* and the *me?* No, no, my tutor, he is the only good philosopher and the only good metaphysician there ever has been."

In another charming passage, in comparing Montaigne with Walpole at his manor of Strawberry Hill, she exclaims: "No, no, Horace resembles Michel more than he thinks he does!" What she likes especially in Montaigne is that he had a friend and believed in friendship. Thus this woman, sceptical as to everything, came, in extreme old age, to believe in something; and for that much must be forgiven her.

Mme. de Sévigné was then extremely in vogue in society; people were reading her Letters, then recently published; and the unpublished ones relating to Fouquet's trial were lent about. Horace Walpole doted on her and called her "Our Lady of Livry." Oh! how many times did Mme. Du Deffand, to please him, envy

the style of "that saint of Livry." "But beware of imitating her," writes Walpole; "your style is yours, as hers is hers." Mme. de Sévigné, be it said, is admirably judged by Mme. Du Deffand, and so is her cousin, Bussy Rabutin. Mme. de Maintenon, also, is clearly apprehended: "I persist in thinking that that woman was not false; but she was cold, austere, unfeeling, without passion. . . ." This whole portrait of Mme. de Maintenon should be read; it remains the best likeness of all that have been made of her. One might be tempted to apply a part of it in its conclusions to Mme. Du Deffand herself if she had not, in loving Walpole with this unlooked-for rejuvenescence, given the lie to her former reputation for insensibility.

Walpole was a collector, an amateur, antiquary, bibliophile, having all sorts of tastes, and perhaps a few manias. Mme. Du Deffand envied him because he never felt *ennui* in solitude; but, with her severe taste, she could not comprehend how any one could like, pell-mell, so many things; read, for instance, Shakespeare and Voltaire's *Guerre de Genève,* admire Mme. de Sévigné and find pleasure in the novels of Crébillon *fils.* She tells him so. In the matter of memoirs and of history she congratulates herself that their tastes are alike. I must be allowed to quote one more passage, because Mme. Du Deffand has been accused of not liking Plutarch, and I am certain that, if she did not like him, she must have thought she discovered in him something too much of a rhetorician:

"I like real lives also," she writes; "I can read only facts written by those to whom they happened, or by those who have witnessed them; and furthermore, I want them related without phrases, without additions, without reflections; I wish the author not to be so concerned to say things well; I want the tone of conversation, vivacity, warmth, and above all, facility, simplicity. Where is that to be found? In a few books we know by heart, and which, assuredly, are not imitated in the present day."

This indicates the side that I call classic, in the highest meaning of the word, in Mme. Du Deffand; that by which she is above and outside of her epoch. I shall not dwell here on the portraits which she drew of the personages of her social world. She excelled in such portraits; fixing into them, ineffaceably, absurdities and follies in a picturesque manner. In the different ways of human beings, she saw only varieties of the universal folly. From the depths of her armchair, blind as she was, she saw all; she uses continually the word "see"; she forgets she has no eyes, and others forget it as they listen to her. She judged even the acting of actors and actresses; and it was she who stamped with a single sentence the characteristic of Mlle. Rancourt, visible on her first appearance: "She is a demoniac without heat."

I have said that Horace Walpole came from England several times to see her. It is curious to gather the impressions of that clever and clear-sighted friend: he raises himself in our estimation and makes us absolve him for his occasional harshness and coldness toward her, by the manner in which he speaks of her to others. He does not shrink from calling her his

"dear old friend." At each journey he thinks she grows younger—a miracle in which he certainly counts for much:

"At seventy-three years of age," he writes (September 7, 1769), "she has the same fire as at twenty-three. She makes couplets and songs, and remembers all those that have been made. Having lived from the most agreeable to the most reasoning epoch, she unites what is best in the two periods, without their defects: all that the first had that was charming without its conceit, all that the second has that is reasonable without its arrogance. I have heard her discuss with all sorts of people all sorts of subjects, and I have never found her mistaken. She can put down the learned, lift up disciples, and find the right word for all. As lively in her impressions as Mme. de Sévigné"—what praise from the lips of Walpole!—"she has none of her prejudices, but a more universal taste. With the frailest of bodies, her vital energy carries her along in a rush of life that would kill me, if I had to stay here. If we return at one in the morning from a supper in the country, she proposes to me a drive around the boulevards, or a visit to the fair, because, she says, 'it is too early to go to bed.' I had great difficulty, last night, in persuading her, though she was quite ill, not to stand about till two or three o'clock to watch for the comet; she had, with that intention, ordered an astronomer to bring his telescope to President Hénault's apartment, under the idea that it would amuse me."

Poor President Hénault, as we see, was not dead: but, for some years, he was little better, and was now a mere wreck. Mme. Du Deffand, on the contrary, to the end of her life in 1780, in her 84th year, remained the same, lively, indefatigable, of "herculean feebleness," as Walpole said. She could not sleep; and felt, more than ever, the need of spending her nights in society: "Whether it injures my health or not," she said, "or whether it suits the régime of the people with whom I like to live, I shall not go to bed

a minute before I must." Like old Wenceslas, she would not sleep till the last moment: "What I take from my nights I add to my days."

In one of the journeys he made to Paris (August, 1775), Walpole, before his boots are off, sees Mme. Du Deffand arriving at his hotel. She is present at his toilet, in which, as she remarks, there is no impropriety, because she cannot see. Walpole goes to sup with her, does not leave her till half-past two that night, and before his eyes are open in the morning receives a letter from her: "In fact," he says, "her soul is immortal and forces her body to keep it company."

There are two traditions about Mme. Du Deffand: the purely French tradition, which has come down to us through those she judged so severely, through the men of Letters and the Encyclopædists; and the direct, truer, more private tradition, for which we must go to Walpole as its source. In the latter we find, with surprise, an ardent woman, impassioned, capable of devotion, and even kind. "*Ah! mon Dieu!*" she cries, "what a great and estimable virtue is kindness! Every day I make a resolution to be kind; I know not if I make any progress." Place that saying, for contrast, beside those terrible words she said after the manner of La Rochefoucauld: "There is not a single person to whom we could confide our troubles without giving him a malignant joy, or without debasing ourselves in his eyes." Well, those two

traditions, the one that makes her unfeeling, and the one that shows her impassioned, must be combined to give a complete idea of her.

But the real key to this heart is in her feeling for Walpole. She regrets in one place that Walpole was not her son, which was quite possible as regards their ages. In fact, we can see in this sudden passion of a sterile old age a sort of maternal tenderness which had never found rest, and which was suddenly aroused, without being aware of its true name. To define the secret instinct and offend no one, let us call it a tenderness of adoption. She loved Walpole as the tenderest of mothers would have loved a son long lost and suddenly restored to her. Many of these singular and erratic passions, in which sensibility misleads itself, are often only a revenge of nature, punishing us for not doing simple things in their right season.

I shall say nothing of Madame Du Deffand's letters from the historical point of view, and the curious light they cast on the last years of Louis XV and the first years of Louis XVI. Nor shall I speak of the tone of her society, which continued quite faithfully, after her, in the circle of the Beauvaus, and even into the salon of the Princesse de Poix under the Empire. I shall only refer to the last letter, so self-restrained, and so touching, which she dictated for Walpole. Her faithful secretary, Viart, could not read it aloud to his mistress after writing it, without bursting into tears; then it was that she said to him, in her naïve

astonishment, these infinitely sad words: "So you *do* love me?" The sore of her whole life is there — unbelief and desire.

She had requested that her little dog, Tonton, be sent to Horace Walpole, that he might take care of it. The faithful Viart, in the letter in which he gives Walpole the details of her illness and death, adds, in closing: "I will keep Tonton until M. Thomas Walpole goes to England; I take the greatest care of him. He is very gentle; he bites no one; he was cross only near his mistress." In a letter from Walpole, dated May 4, 1781, I find these words: "The little dog of my poor, dear Mme. Du Deffand has come. She made me promise to take care of him the last time I saw her; this I shall do religiously; I will make the poor animal as happy as possible." I, myself, would not do like Buffon, and forget the dog of the blind.

Lord Chesterfield.

Lord Chesterfield.

AT all epochs there have been treatises intended to form the "Man of Honour," the "Well-bred Man," the "Courtier," where there were Courts, and the "Perfect Knight." In these various treatises on good-breeding and polite manners, if we open them in successive ages, we shall discover, at first sight, parts that are as much out of date as the fashions and the coats of our fathers. Evidently patterns have changed. But looking a little closer, we shall find, if the treatise has been written by a man of sense who knows mankind, that there is still much by which to profit in the study of those models that have been set up before the eyes of preceding generations.

The Letters that Lord Chesterfield addressed to his son, which are a whole school of good-breeding and knowledge of the world, have the particularly interesting merit that their writer never thought of setting up a model; he merely wished to train an excellent pupil in his private life. These were confidential letters which were suddenly brought to light, revealing all the secrets and betraying the ingenious artifices of paternal solicitude. If, in reading them to-day, we

are struck by the excessive importance given to incidental and passing particulars, to details of dress, for instance, we are no less struck by the lasting side, that which belongs to the sum of human observation in all ages; and this last part is much more considerable than we might think from a first superficial glance. In seeking to train his son to all that became an honourable man in social life, Lord Chesterfield did not write a treatise "On Duties" like Cicero; he left letters which, by their mixture of right judgment and levity, by certain frivolous airs insensibly mingled with serious graces, hold, fairly well, a middle place between the "Memoirs of the Chevalier de Grammont" and *Télémaque*.

Before enlarging upon the Letters we need to know a little about Lord Chesterfield, one of the most brilliant minds in England in his day, and also one of those most closely allied with France. Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield, was born in London, September 22, 1694, the same year that Voltaire was born. Sprung from an illustrious race, he knew the value of his birth and desired to sustain its honour; but he found it difficult not to laugh at genealogical pretensions carried to extremes. To guard himself from them once for all, he placed among the portraits of his ancestors two old figures of a man and a woman; on the frame of one was written Adam Stanhope, on that of the other, Eve Stanhope. Thus, while holding firmly to his real honours, he cut short all chimerical fancies.

LORD CHESTERFIELD.

From an old painting.

His father took no interest in his education, and he was given over to the care of his grandmother, Lady Halifax. He was early conscious of a desire to excel and be first in everything; a desire he would have liked, later, to excite in the breast of his son, and which, for good and for evil, is the principle of all great things. As he himself, in his first youth, had no guidance, he made mistakes more than once in the objects of his emulation, and conceived a false notion of honour. He confesses that at one period of his inexperience he fell into excess in wine and into other excesses to which he was not naturally inclined, but his vanity was gratified in being called a man of pleasure. So with gambling, which he then considered a necessary ingredient in the composition of a young man of fashion. He therefore plunged into it without any passion at first, but soon could not withdraw from its fascination; and compromised his fortune in that way for years. "Take warning by my example," he says to his son, "choose your pleasures yourself, and let none of them master you."

This desire to excel and to distinguish himself did not always mislead him; he often applied it wisely; his first studies were admirable. Placed at Cambridge University, he took all the courses that were taught there; he studied civil law, philosophy, and mathematics under the learned and blind Saunderson. He read Greek fluently, and gave account in French of his progress to his old teacher, a French refugee pastor,

M. Jouneau. Lord Chesterfield had learned the French language in childhood from a Norman nurse who took care of him. When he came to Paris for the last time, in 1741, M. de Fontenelle, having remarked in his pronunciation something of the Norman accent, asked him if he had not originally learned the language from a person of that province; which was in fact the case.

After two years at the university, he made the tour of the continent, according to a custom of the young noblemen of his country. He visited Holland, Italy, and France. Writing from Paris, December 7, 1714, to this same M. Jouneau, he says :

"I will not tell you my sentiments about Frenchmen, because I am often taken for one of them, and more than one Frenchman has paid me the greatest compliment they think they can make to any one, which is : 'Monsieur, you are exactly like us.' I will only tell you that I am insolent, I talk much, very loud, and in the tone of a master ; that I sing and dance as I walk along ; and finally that I am furiously extravagant in powder, feathers, and white gloves, etc."

He will do justice, later, to our serious qualities, but here we see the mocking spirit, satirical and slightly insolent, which makes its point at our expense.

In his Letters to his son, he pictures himself, on the occasion of his first entrance into polite society, as still covered with the rust of Cambridge, shamefaced, silent, and finally taking his courage in both hands to say to a lady : "Do you not think it is very hot to-day, madam ?" Lord Chesterfield tells that to his son not to discourage him, but to show him from what beginnings he himself had advanced. He

does the honours of his own person to embolden the lad, and the better to draw him closer to himself. I do not allow myself to take him at his word in this anecdote. If he were ever for one moment embarrassed in society, that moment must have been short indeed!

Queen Anne had just died; Chesterfield rejoiced in the succession of the House of Hanover, of which he was to be one of the declared champions. He had a seat in the House of Commons, and made his first appearance there on a good footing. Yet it is said that an apparently frivolous circumstance held him in check and paralysed, in some degree, his eloquence. One of the members of the House, who was not distinguished for any other superior talent, had that of imitating to perfection the speakers to whom he replied. Chesterfield feared ridicule (a foible of his), and he was silent upon certain occasions oftener than he wished to be, lest he should afford opportunity for the mimicry of his colleague. He soon after inherited the peerage on the death of his father and passed into the House of Lords, the surroundings of which may have been better suited to the grace, refinement, and urbanity of his eloquence. But he never compared the two scenes as regarded the importance of their debates, or the political influence to be acquired in them:

"It is unheard of," he said later of Pitt, at the moment when that great orator consented to enter the Upper House under the title of Earl of Chatham: "it is unheard of that a man in the plenitude of

his power, at the very moment when his ambition had just obtained the most complete triumph, should quit the House which had procured him that power, and which alone could secure it to him, to retire into that hospital for incurables, the House of Lords "

It is not for me to estimate here the political career of Lord Chesterfield. If I dared to hazard a judgment upon it as a whole, I should say that his ambition was never wholly satisfied, and that the brilliant distinction with which his public life was filled covered, in the depths below, many disappointed aspirations and wasted hopes. Twice, in the two decisive circumstances of his political life, he was stranded. Young, and in the first fire of his ambition, he early staked his whole career on the side of the presumptive heir to the crown, who became George II. He was of those who, on the accession of that prince in 1727, had a right to count upon favour and a place in power. But, able as he was, in seeking to turn to the side of the rising sun he did not do so with perfect judgment. He had long courted the mistress of the prince, believing in her coming influence, but he neglected the legitimate wife, the future queen, who proved in the end to have the only real power. Queen Caroline never forgave him. This was the first check to the political fortunes of Lord Chesterfield, who was then thirty-three years old and in the full tide of his hopes. He was too hasty and he chose the wrong path. Robert Walpole, less active and apparently less clever, took his measures more carefully, and calculated better.

Thus thrown with some scandal into the Opposition, and especially after 1731, when he was forced to resign his offices at Court, Lord Chesterfield worked with all his strength for ten years to overthrow the Walpole ministry, which did not fall till 1742. Even then, he did not attain to power; he was still left outside of the new combinations. When, two years later, in 1744, he entered the administration, first as ambassador to The Hague, then as Viceroy to Ireland, next as Secretary of State and member of the Cabinet (1746–1748) his actual power was more specious than real. In a word, Lord Chesterfield, at all times an eminent public man in his country, whether as one of the leaders of the Opposition, or as an able diplomatist, was never a directing minister, nor even a very influential minister.

In public affairs, he certainly had the distant *coup d'œil,* and that outlook upon the future which comes from breadth of mind; but he possessed these qualities far more than he did the persevering patience and the practical firmness in daily work which are so necessary to men in government. It would be true to say of him, as of La Rochefoucauld, that public life served to make an accomplished moralist of an incomplete man of action.

In 1744, at the age of only fifty, his political ambition seemed to be partly worn out; his health was enough affected to make him think with satisfaction of retirement. Besides which, he had a secret ideal and a real ambition, the object of which is now known

to us. He had had, before his marriage and about the year 1732, a son by a French lady (Mme. du Bouchet), whom he had met in Holland. To that son he attached himself with extreme tenderness; he wrote to him in all sincerity: "From the first day of your life, the dearest object of my own has been to render you as perfect as the weakness of human nature will allow." To the education of this son all his aspirations, all his predilections and worldly hopes had turned; whether Viceroy in Ireland, or Secretary of State in London, he found time to write him long, detailed letters, directing his every action, for the purpose of perfecting him in the serious and polite arts of life.

The Chesterfield whom we prefer to study is, therefore, the man of intellect and experience, who has passed through public office and tried all rôles of political life only to know their every mechanism and to give us the last word upon them; the man who, in his youth, was the friend of Pope and of Bolingbroke, the introducer into England of Montesquieu and Voltaire, the correspondent of Fontenelle and Mme. de Tencin; he whom the Academy of Inscriptions elected to its membership, who united the mental qualities of the two nations, and who, in a witty Essay, but more particularly in his Letters to his son, shows himself to us as a moralist, as agreeable as he is finished, and as one of the masters of life. It is the La Rochefoucauld of England whom we are now studying.

Montesquieu, after the publication of the *Esprit des Lois*, wrote to the Abbé de Guasco, who was then in England: "Tell Lord Chesterfield that nothing has gratified me so much as his approbation; and that as he is reading me for the third time, he will be well able to tell me what to improve and to rectify in my work; nothing could be more instructive than his observations and his criticism." It was Chesterfield who, speaking one day to Montesquieu of the proneness of Frenchmen to revolution and of their impatience with slow reforms, summed up our whole history in the pithy sentence: "You Frenchmen know how to make barricades, but you will never know how to raise barriers!"

Lord Chesterfield certainly enjoyed Voltaire; he said, apropos of the *Siècle de Louis XIV:* "Lord Bolingbroke taught me how we ought to read history, Voltaire teaches me how it ought to be written." But at the same time, with that practical sense that never deserts men of intellect on the other side of the Channel, he perceived Voltaire's imprudences, and disapproved of them. When old, and wholly retired from society, he wrote to a French lady:

"Your good authors are my principal resource; Voltaire, above all, charms me, except for his impiety, with which he cannot keep himself from larding all he writes. He would do better to suppress it wisely; for after all is said, no one ought to disturb the established order. Let every man think as he will, or rather, as he can, but not communicate his ideas when they are of a nature to trouble the peace of society."

What he said then, in 1768, Chesterfield had already said twenty-five years earlier in writing to Crébillon *fils*—singular correspondent, and singular confidant in the matter of morals! He was speaking of Voltaire, with reference to his tragedy of *Mahomet* and the daring things he had put into it:

"What I cannot pardon, for it is unpardonable, is the trouble he gives himself to propagate a doctrine as pernicious to civil society as it is contrary to the common religion of all countries. I doubt very much whether it is permissible for a man to write against the worship and belief of his nation, even though he be sincerely convinced that it is full of errors, on account of the confusion and disorder he will surely cause; but I am very certain that it is not at all permissible to attack the foundations of morality and break the bonds, already too weak, that hold men to their duty.

In writing thus Chesterfield was not mistaken as to Voltaire's great inconsistency. That inconsistency, in two words, was this: Voltaire, who considered all men as fools or as children, who had not laughter enough with which to ridicule them, nevertheless placed loaded weapons in their hands without troubling himself as to the use they might make of them.

Lord Chesterfield himself, in the eyes of the puritans of his country, has been accused, as I ought to state, of making a breach of morality by the Letters he addressed to his son. The severe Johnson, who in other respects was not impartial in regard to Chesterfield and thought he had grounds of complaint against him, said, when the Letters were first published, that they "taught the morals of a wanton and the manners of a dancing-

master." That judgment is superlatively unjust; if Chesterfield, in some particular case, insists on graces of manner, and on being agreeable at any price, it is because he has already dwelt on the solid parts of education, so that his pupil is not so much in danger of sinning on the side that renders a man "respectable" as on that which renders him agreeable. Though more than one passage in these Letters may seem very strange coming from a father to a son, taken as a whole they are inspired by a true spirit of tenderness and wisdom. If Horace had had a son, I fancy he would not have written to him otherwise.

The Letters begin with the *a b c* of education and instruction. Chesterfield teaches, and sums up in French for his son, the first elements of mythology and history. I do not regret that these first letters have been published: excellent advice is slipped into them. The little Stanhope was only eight years old, when his father drew up for him a manual of rhetoric suited to his understanding, by which he tried to instil into him good language, and distinction in the manner of expressing himself. He especially recommends to him *attention* in all he does, and he gives full value to that word. It is *attention* only, he tells him, that impresses objects on the memory: "There is not in all the world a surer sign of a small and paltry mind than inattention. All that is worth the trouble of doing, deserves and requires to be well done, and nothing can be well done without attention." This precept he repeats

incessantly, and he varies its application as his pupil grows older and is more in a condition to understand it to its full extent. In pleasure or in study, he wishes that each thing done should be done well, done fully, and at its right time, without hindrance or distraction. "When you read Horace," he says, "pay attention to the accuracy of his thought, to the elegance of his diction, to the beauty of his poesy, and do not be thinking of the *De Homine et Cive* of Puffendorf; and when you read Puffendorf do not think of Mme. de Saint-Germain." But such free and firm disposal of thought by the action of the will is in the power of very great or very good minds only.

M. Royer-Collard was wont to say that "what specially marked our age was *respect* in the moral order, and *attention* in the intellectual order." Lord Chesterfield, with his less serious air, would have been capable of that saying. He was not long in realising what was lacking in the son he was trying to form, and who was, indeed, the occupation and object of his life:

"In scrutinising your personality to its depths," he writes, "I have not, thank God, discovered as yet any viciousness of heart, any weakness of the brain; but I have discovered laziness, inattention, and indifference; defects which are only pardonable in aged persons who, in the decline of life when health and vigour lessen, have a kind of right to that sort of tranquillity. But a young man should be ambitious to shine and to excel."

Now, it is precisely this sacred fire, this spark that makes the heroes, the Alexanders, the Cæsars,—*to be first in all that they undertake,*—it was this motto of

great hearts and of eminent minds of all classes that nature had neglected to put into the worthy but thoroughly commonplace soul of young Stanhope. "You seem to lack," his father says to him, "that *vivida vis animi* which stirs, which instigates most young men to please, to shine, to outdo others."—"When I was your age," he says again, "I should have been ashamed that another could learn his lesson better than I, or could beat me at any game; and I should have had no peace till I recovered the advantage."

The whole of this little Course of Education by letters has a sort of continued dramatic interest. We follow the effort of a keen, distinguished, energetic nature, such as that of Lord Chesterfield, in its struggle with an honest but indolent nature, a soft, lethargic dough, of which the father desires to make, at any cost, an accomplished masterpiece, agreeable, original; succeeding, finally, in making nothing better than an estimable copy. What sustains this struggle, — in which so much art is expended and the eternal counsel recurs, always the same at the bottom, under all its metamorphoses, — what sincerely touches the reader, is the true, paternal affection which inspires the delicate and excellent master, patient this once, however eager, prodigal of resources and skill, never discouraged, inexhaustibly sowing on that barren soil the elegances and graces of life. Not that this son, the object of so much culture and zeal, was unworthy of his father in any way. It has been said that no

one was ever more stupid, more sulky than he; and a harsh saying of Dr. Johnson is quoted in proof of it. But such opinions are caricatures that go beyond the truth. It appears, from more accurate testimony, that Mr. Stanhope, without being a model of grace, had, in reality, the air of a well-bred, polished, agreeable man. But do we not feel that the discouraging point is just there? It might, perhaps, have been better to fail totally than to have made, with so much care and trouble, an insignificant and ordinary man of society, one of those of whom it is said, for all judgment, that there is nothing to say. There was surely enough to discourage and make the work seem pitiful to any but a father.

Lord Chesterfield thought, at first, of France, as the best place to refine his son and give him the pliancy and ease that he never afterwards acquired. In his private letters to a lady in Paris, Mme. de Monconseil, we see that he thought of sending him there in early youth:

"I have a boy," he writes to this friend, "who is now thirteen years old. I will confess to you that he is not legitimate, but his mother is a person well born, who showed me kindnesses that I did not deserve. As for the boy, perhaps it is prepossession, but I think him lovable; he has a pretty face, much vivacity and, I believe, intelligence for his age. He speaks French perfectly, he knows much of Latin and Greek, and he has history, ancient and modern, at his fingers' ends. He is at present in school; but as no one dreams here of training the manners and morals of young men, who are nearly all boobys, awkward and impolite, in short, such as you see them when they come to Paris at twenty or twenty-one years of age, I do not wish my boy to stay here long enough to get those bad tendencies

That is why I intend, as soon as he is fourteen, to send him to Paris. . . . As I love this child extremely, and pique myself that I can make something good of him, because I think the stuff is there, my idea is to unite in his person what I have, so far, never found in any one individual, namely: what there is of good in the two nations."

He enters into the details of his plan and the means he expects to employ: an English teacher for the mornings, a French tutor for the afternoons, aided, above all, by the gay world and good society. The war that broke out between France and England postponed this project of a Parisian education, and the young man did not make his first appearance in French society until 1751, when nineteen years of age and after completing the grand tour of Switzerland, Germany, and Italy. All had been arranged by the most attentive of fathers for his success and his welcome on this new stage. The youth is lodged at the Académie, with M. de la Guérinière; in the mornings he is to do his exercises; the afternoons he must devote to society: "Pleasure is now to be the last branch of your education," writes the indulgent father; "it will soften and polish your manners; it will induce you to seek and then to acquire the graces." On this latter point Chesterfield is exacting and gives no quarter. The *graces;* it is to them that he returns perpetually, for without them all efforts are vain: "If they do not come to you, seize them!" he cries. As if to know how to seize them were not already having them!

Three ladies, friends of his father, are specially

charged to watch over and guide the young man at his start; they are his *governesses* for society: Mme. de Monconseil, Lady Hervey, and Mme. Du Bocage. But these introducers seemed essential for his start only; after that, the young man must go of himself, and choose some more charming and intimate guide. On the delicate subject of women, Lord Chesterfield breaks the ice: "I shall not speak to you on this topic as a theologian, a moralist, or a father"; he says, "I put aside my age to consider yours only. I wish to speak to you as one man of pleasure would do to another if he has good taste and intelligence." And he explains his meaning; stimulating the young man as much as he can towards "honourable arrangements" and refined pleasures in order to turn him from easy and coarse habits. He has for principle that "an honourable arrangement becomes a man." All his morality, in this respect, may be summed up in Voltaire's line: "Nought is evil in good company." It is at such points that Johnson's grave modesty veils itself; ours only smiles.

The serious and the frivolous mingle incessantly in these letters. Marcel, the dancing-master, is much recommended; Montesquieu no less. The Abbé de Guasco, a sort of hanger-on to Montesquieu, is a useful personage as an introducer here and there:

"Between ourselves," writes Chesterfield, "he has more knowledge than talent; but a clever man knows how to get some good out of every one, and every man is good for something. As for

President Montesquieu, he is, in every respect, a precious acquaintance. He has genius, with the most extensive reading in the world. Draw from that source as much as you can."

Among authors, those that Chesterfield recommends, especially at this epoch, are La Rochefoucauld and La Bruyère: "If you read in the morning a few of La Rochefoucauld's maxims, consider them, examine them well; compare them with the originals you will meet in the evening. Read La Bruyère in the morning, and judge at night if his portraits are good likenesses." But these excellent guides are not themselves to have other utility than that of a geographical map. Without personal observation and experience they would be useless, and even lead to error, as a map would do if we relied upon its complete knowledge of towns and provinces. Better read one man than ten books: "The world is a country that no one has ever known through descriptions; each of us must travel over it in person to get initiated."

Here follow a few precepts and comments that are worthy of a master of human morals:

"The most essential knowledge of all, I mean knowledge of the world, is never acquired without great attention; I know a goodly number of aged persons who, after living much in society, are still mere children in knowledge of the world. . . .

"Human nature is the same the world over; but its workings are so varied by education and by habit, that we ought to see it under all its customs before we can say that we know it intimately. . . .

"Nearly all men are born with all the passions to a certain degree; but there is scarcely any man who does not have a ruling passion, to

which the others are subordinate. Discover in each individual that ruling passion, pry into the folds of his heart; and observe the diverse effects of the same passion in different natures. And when you have found the ruling passion of a man, remember never to trust him wherever that passion has an interest. . . ."

"If you wish to win the good graces and affection of certain persons, men or women, try to discover their most salient merit, if they have one, and their ruling weakness, for every one has that; then, do justice to the one, and a little more than justice to the other. . . .

"Women, in general, have but one object—their beauty; in regard to it there can hardly be flattery too gross for them to swallow. . . .

"The flattery that will most truly touch women who are really beautiful, as well as those who are decidedly ugly, is that which applies to their minds. . . ."

As regards women, though he seems at times very contemptuous, he makes reparation to them at other times; and, above all, whatever he may think himself, he never allows his son to say much evil of them:

"You seem to think that from Eve to the present day they have done much harm; as for the aforesaid lady, I give her up to you; but since her day, history will show you that men have done far more evil in the world than women; but, to tell you the truth, I advise you to trust to neither more than is absolutely necessary. What I also advise you is never to attack whole bodies of persons, whatever they may be. Individuals pardon sometimes; but bodies and societies never pardon."

In general, Chesterfield recommends to his son circumspection and a sort of prudent neutrality, even as regards both the rascals and the fools who swarm in the world: "Excepting their friendship, there is nothing more dangerous than their enmity." This is not the morality of Cato and Zeno; it is that of Alcibiades, Aristippus, and Atticus.

On religion he says, in reply to certain cutting remarks made by his son: "The reason of every man is, and ought to be, his guide; I should have as much right to exact that all men should be of my height and my temperament, as to insist that they should reason precisely as I do."

In all things it is his opinion that we ought to know and love the good and the best, but not to make ourselves the champions thereof against all and every one. We ought to know, even in literature, how to tolerate the weakness of others: "Let them tranquilly enjoy their errors of taste as well as of religion." Oh! how far we are from such wisdom in our bitter trade of criticism as we now make it!

He does not, however, counsel falsehood: he is explicit on that point. His precept is: Never say all, but never lie. "I have always observed," he repeats frequently, "that the greatest fools are the greatest liars. For myself, I judge of a man's veracity by the strength of his mind."

The serious, as we see, blends readily in Chesterfield with the agreeable. He is constantly demanding of the mind both firmness and flexibility, gentleness in manner with energy beneath it. Lord Chesterfield truly felt the seriousness of France and of all which the eighteenth century brought with it that was fruitful and redoubtable. According to him: "Duclos, in his *Réflexions,* is right in saying that a germ of reason is beginning to develop in France; and I confidently

predict," adds Chesterfield, "that before the end of this century, the business of king and priest will be more than half gone." The French Revolution was thus predicted by him in 1750.

He cautioned his son from the outset against the idea that the French are purely frivolous: "The cold inhabitants of the North consider the French a frivolous people, who whistle and sing and dance all the time: this idea is a long way from the truth, though many *dandies* may seem to justify it. But those very dandies, matured by age and by experience, are often metamorphosed into very capable men." The ideal, according to him, would be to unite the good qualities of both nations; but he seems in this mixture to incline more to the side of France: "I have said several times, and I really think it, that a Frenchman who adds to a foundation of virtue, erudition, and good sense the manners and politeness of his country attains to the perfection of human nature."

He united fairly well in himself the merits of the two nations, with an additional trait that belongs to his race. He had imagination in his intellect. Hamilton had this distinctive quality, and carried it into his French intellect. Bacon, the great moralist, is almost a poet in expression. The same cannot be said of Lord Chesterfield, and yet he had more imagination in his wit and in his intellect than we find in Saint-Évremond and in our brilliant moralists in general. In this respect he is like his friend Montesquieu.

Although, in these Letters to his son, we are obliged, without being rigorous, to note certain points of a somewhat corrupt morality, we must also point out, by way of compensation, the very serious and altogether admirable passages in which he speaks of Cardinal de Retz, of Mazarin, of Bolingbroke, of Marlborough, and of many others. It is a rich book. We cannot read a page without retaining in our minds some valuable observation.

Lord Chesterfield destined this son, so dear to him, to diplomacy; at first he found some difficulty in carrying out his plans because of the young man's illegitimacy. To put an end to such objections, he made him enter Parliament, as the surest means of overcoming the scruples of the Court. Mr. Stanhope in his maiden speech, had a moment's hesitation, and was forced to have recourse to his notes. He never again renewed the attempt to speak in public. It seems that he succeeded better in diplomacy; but always in secondary rôles that required only solid worth. He filled the post of envoy extraordinary to the Court of Dresden. But his health, at all times delicate, gave way in youth, and his father had the grief of seeing him die before him at the early age of thirty-six (1768).

At this period, Lord Chesterfield was living a sequestered life on account of his infirmities, of which the most distressing to him was total deafness. Montesquieu, when his sight was failing, had formerly

said to him: "I know how to be blind." But Chesterfield admitted that he could not say as much, for he knew not how to be deaf. He wrote oftener to his friends, even to those in France: "Intercourse by letters," he wrote, "is the conversation of the deaf and their sole link to society." He found his greatest consolation in his pretty country-house at Blackheath, to which he had given, in French fashion, the name of Babiole [the Bauble]. There he busied himself in gardening and in cultivating pineapples and melons; he said he "vegetated in company with them":

"I have vegetated this whole year," he wrote to a lady in Paris (1763), "without pleasures and without troubles: my age and my deafness forbid the first; my philosophy, or perhaps my temperament (they are often mistaken for each other), guarantees me from the latter. I always derive the best I can from the tranquil amusements of gardening, walks, and reading; meantime, I await death without desiring it or dreading it."

He undertook no long works, for which he felt himself too weary, but he sometimes sent agreeable Essays to a periodical called "The World." These Essays confirm his reputation for refinement and urbanity. But nothing approaches the work which, to him, was no work at all; namely: these Letters, which he never expected that any one would read, but which are to-day the fund of his literary wealth.

His old age, beginning rather precociously, dragged slowly along. His wit played in a hundred ways on that sad theme; speaking of himself and one of his friends, Lord Tyrawley, who was equally old and in-

firm: "Tyrawley and I," he said, "have been dead these two years, but we don't wish it known." Voltaire, who while claiming to be always at death's door, still remained young, wrote to him (October 21, 1771) this pretty letter, signed "The Old Sick Man of Ferney":

". . . Enjoy your honourable and fortunate old age, after passing through the trials of life. Enjoy your mind, and preserve the health of your body. Of the five senses that we all share, you have but one that has weakened; Lord Huntingdon assures me that you have a good stomach, which is worth more than a pair of ears. Perhaps it might be for me to decide which is the saddest, to be deaf, or blind, or unable to digest, as I can judge of these three conditions from thorough knowledge; but it is long since I gave up deciding about trifles, and longer still about important things. I confine myself to believing that if you have sun in the beautiful house you have built for yourself, you must have tolerable moments; that is all we can expect at our years. Cicero wrote a fine treatise on old age, but he did not prove his work by his life; his last years were very unhappy. You have lived longer and more happily than he. You have had nothing to do with perpetual dictators, or with triumvirs. Your lot has been, and is still, one of the most desirable in this great lottery where the lucky tickets are rare, and where the grand prize of continual happiness was never won by anybody. Your philosophy has never been upset by chimeras which have sometimes muddled very good brains. You have never been, in any way, a charlatan, or the dupe of charlatans; and I count that as an uncommon merit which contributes to the shadow of felicity which we enjoy in this short life."

Lord Chesterfield died on the 24th of March, 1773. In thus indicating his charming course of worldly education, it has not seemed to me out of place to take lessons in good breeding and polite manners, even in a democracy; and to take them from a man

whose name is so closely connected with those of Voltaire and Montesquieu; a man who, more than any other of his compatriots, showed remarkable predilections for our nation; who more than was reasonable, perhaps, delighted in our agreeable qualities; who also appreciated our graver qualities, and of whom one might say, for all eulogy, that his mind was French, if he had not possessed in the warmth and vivacity of his wit that gift of imagination which is the sign-manual of his race.

Franklin.

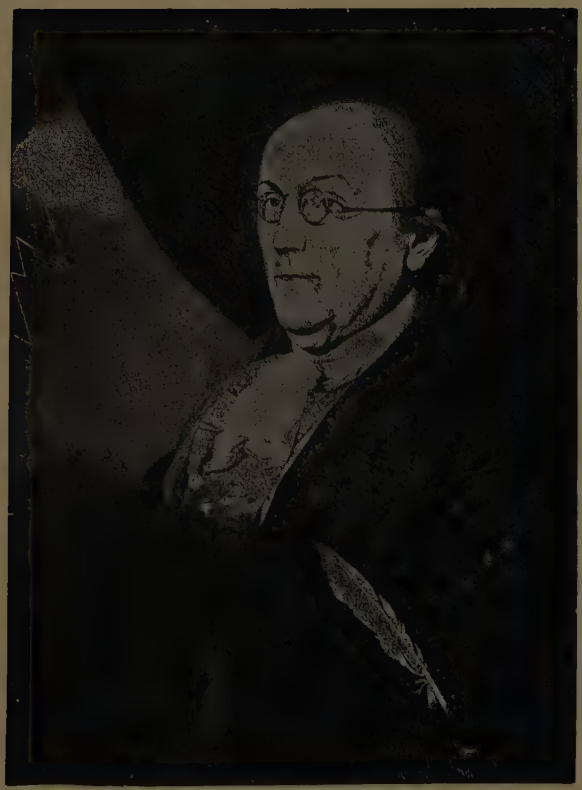
Benjamin Franklin.

THERE are certain foreign names which, in some respects, belong to France, or, at least, touch her very closely. The eighteenth century had several which, at certain moments, have been welcomed and almost adopted by us; they would form quite a list from Bolingbroke to Franklin. In naming those two men, I have named two great inoculators in the moral or philosophical order; but Bolingbroke, in exile, and coming at the beginning of the century, affected a few persons only, whereas Franklin, coming later, and at an epoch of general fermentation, operated on a great number. The history of ideas and of public opinion in the years that preceded the French Revolution would be incomplete if we did not pause to study Franklin. I shall try to do so by the help of certain published works upon him, but, above all, by studying his own words.

Franklin wrote his "Memoirs," which, unfortunately, he never finished. The first part, addressed to his son, was written during his stay in England, in 1771; in it he gives a detailed and intimate history of himself until his twenty-fifth year. The great public

affairs in which he was soon more and more deeply engaged leaving him no leisure, he did not resume his narrative until urged by friends to do so during his sojourn in Paris in 1784. This second part of the "Memoirs," which shows him busy with affairs of public interest and with the political management of Pennsylvania, comes down to the period of his first mission to England in 1757, when, at the age of fifty-one, he is commissioned by his compatriots to go and plead their interests against the descendants of William Penn, who were abusing their rights. From that period we have nothing more than fragments of narrative and his "Correspondence," which, it is true, is very complete, and leaves little to be desired. Nevertheless, the judicious, shrewd, and amiable guide does not lead us by the hand to the end, and that is a distinct loss. The two parts of the "Memoirs" that we do possess are fully sufficient, however, to show us the man himself, and they make the most original and most profitable reading to be found in this familiar and wholly modern style of book.

Franklin was a man rightly named, and he well justified his name; for that word "Franklin" signified primitively a free man, a freeholder, enjoying on a little property of his own a rural and natural life. His family were natives of Northamptonshire in England, where, for more than three hundred years, they had possessed a small holding, to the products of which were added the profits of a forge. These blacksmith



BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.

From an oil painting in the possession of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

farmers were Protestants of the old stamp, faithful to the Anglican dogma, even under the persecuting reign of Queen Mary. Towards the close of the reign of Charles II, an uncle of Franklin and his father adopted the doctrines of certain non-conformist preachers. The father emigrated young, in 1682, carrying wife and children to America, where he settled at Boston in New England. Benjamin Franklin was born in Boston, January 17, 1706, the last son of a numerous family: two sisters were born after him, making, in all, sixteen children by two mothers. His father, who had been a dyer in England, started in Boston a manufactory of soap and candles. He thought at first of devoting Benjamin to the service of the Church, as the tenth, or tithe, of his sons; but, his small means not permitting it, he put him into his own business, and employed him in cutting wicks and filling moulds with tallow. Young Franklin had a decided taste for the sea; he would there have found a career well suited to the exercise of his natural qualities of boldness, prudence, and constant observation. His father opposed it. This father, a simple artisan, was, according to his son, a man of strong sense and solid mind, a good judge in all matters of private or general interest that demanded caution. His advice counted for much, and the people of his region were not slow, when need was, to consult him. He died at eighty-nine years of age; and his wife, Benjamin's mother, died at eighty-five; the boy, therefore, in his humble

sphere, came of a strong and healthy race; he was its emancipated scion, and he brought it to perfection in himself.

This emancipation of his intellect seems to have suffered neither obstruction nor delay. From childhood he had a passionate love for reading; his father's library, we can well believe, was ill-supplied; it consisted chiefly of books on religious polemics. He read them; but above all, he read "Plutarch's Lives," which, by a lucky chance, was among them. He bought a few books of travels; a little later, a dilapidated volume of Addison's "Spectator" fell into his hands and served him to form a style. Half from recollection, half by invention, he himself tried to write on some of the same subjects; then, comparing what he had written with the original, he corrected his faults, and he fancied sometimes that on points of detail he was not always worsted.

When he read this ragged volume of the "Spectator" he was no longer working in his father's shop. The latter, seeing his repugnance to the business of making candles, and having tried to turn him to some mechanical trade properly so called (upholsterer, turner, etc.), finally apprenticed him to another of his sons, a printer. Benjamin was then twelve years old, and he remained an apprentice till he was twenty-one. His great anxiety was to procure books and to husband the time to read them, all the while doing his work faithfully. Having read, when he was about

sixteen, a book which recommended an exclusively vegetable diet, he resolved to try it, as being more philosophical as well as more economical. When his comrades left the printing-office to get their meals, he quickly ate his, which he had frugally prepared himself, and the time he thus gained he spent in reading, studying arithmetic and the first elements of geometry, but above all, in reading Locke on the "Human Understanding," and the "Art of Thinking" by the gentlemen of Port-Royal.

Never did a more vigorous and healthy mind train itself with less cost, and react upon itself with greater freedom and fewer scholastic prejudices. Let us consider what Boston, or any other city in North America, was at that date. There were provinces in which Quakers made nearly one-third of the population; the various Presbyterian or dissenting sects were the majority. From the first consideration that he gave those sects, all, more or less, emanating from Calvin, Franklin was unable to accept their anti-natural and crushing dogmas. He was a freethinker and a deist; and at first he was so with that fresh ardour and need of proselyting which is so natural to youth. He liked arguments on such subjects, which sharpened his dialectic subtlety, but, little by little, he corrected himself of that tendency. Having obtained a copy of the "Memorable Sayings" of Socrates, by Xenophon, he took pleasure in striving to reproduce its method; he owned afterwards that he sometimes abused it. He amused

himself by leading the person he talked with into making concessions of which the latter did not foresee the consequences, and then he triumphed in the inextricable muddle into which he had led him. One of the master-printers (Keimer), for whom he afterwards worked in Philadelphia, had been caught so often, that finally he refused to answer Franklin's simplest questions without first asking him, "What are you aiming to infer?" This rather Scotian and sophistical method, which Socrates himself does not seem to me to have escaped wholly, was one of the perversities of Franklin's youth; he cured himself gradually, limiting the expression of his thought to the dubitable form, and avoiding a dogmatic appearance. He had reflected much on the manner of persuading men through their own interests, and he recognised that for that end we must not seem too sure of our own opinion; men will agree better and consent more readily to receive from us what they think they partly find in themselves.

Montesquieu, in the *Lettres Persanes,* speaks of a person with a positive and dictatorial tone—such as we still know in these days: "I found myself lately," writes Rica to Usbek, "in company with a man very content with himself. In one quarter of an hour he had decided three questions of morals, four historical problems, and five points of physics. I never before met so universal a *decisionist.*" Franklin was quite the contrary of that man. He ended by sup-

pressing in his vocabulary the words *certainly, undoubtedly:*

"I adopted in their place," he says, "'I conceive,' 'I presume,' 'I imagine,' that such a thing is thus or thus; or else I say: 'It seems to me at present.' When a person puts forward something that I believe to be an error, I refuse myself the pleasure of contradicting him promptly, and instantly demonstrating the absurdity of his proposition; in replying, I begin by observing that in certain cases or circumstances, his opinion might be just, but that, in the present case, it *seemed to me* that there might be some difference, etc. I soon found the advantage of this change of tone. The conversations I had were more agreeable; the modest manner in which I put forth my opinions procured them a readier reception and less contradiction; I had less mortification myself when I found out I was wrong; and I was more able to make others see that they were wrong and bring them to agree with me when I was right. This method, which I did not adopt without doing some violence to my natural inclination, became to me in the long run easy, and so habitual that perhaps no one, for the last fifty years, has heard a dogmatic expression escape my lips."

He attributes to this precaution—after his known character for integrity—the influence he obtained with his compatriots in his various proposals for the public good. He tells us his secret; the artifice is simple and innocent, it comes originally from Socrates; let us beware of confounding it, in any case, with the deception of Ulysses.

Franklin's brother began, about the year 1720, or 1721, to print a newspaper; it was the second that appeared in America. Benjamin, who saw its making, who heard the talk of those who contributed by their pens, and who himself worked at printing it, had a desire to write a few articles, but feeling sure they

would be rejected with contempt on account of his youth, if the writer were known, he sent them anonymously, disguising his writing. The articles succeeded, he rejoiced inwardly, and kept the secret until he finished all that he then had to say. His brother was soon after arrested and imprisoned by order of the President of the General Assembly of the province for having inserted an opposition political article; and was released only under prohibition of continuing to print his newspaper. He evaded the prohibition by issuing the paper under the name of his brother, young Benjamin, to whom he returned, as a mere form, his bond of apprenticeship with the release therefrom. It was settled, however, by a new agreement intended to to be kept secret, that Benjamin should continue to serve as apprentice to the end of the term originally agreed upon. Here we find the confession of a fault by Franklin, or what he calls, in his language as a printer, "one of the first errata of my life." Ill-treated by his brother, who was violent and sometimes came to blows, he resolved, after one of these quarrels, to quit him, and he did so on the warranty of the certificate of release from apprenticeship, knowing well that his brother would not dare to produce the secret agreement.

The confessions that Franklin makes of his wrong-doings (and we find three or four in these years of his youth) have a character of sincerity and simplicity which leaves no doubt as to the nature of the man

who makes them. When Rousseau, in his "Confessions," makes such avowals, he is very near to boasting of them at the moment he confesses them. Franklin, who, in any case, has only slight wrong-doings with which to reproach himself, is less severe upon his actions and does not boast of them at all. He says, in a charming manner, at the beginning of his "Memoirs," that he would have "no objection to live the same career over again, from beginning to end, claiming only the privilege that all authors have, to correct in the second edition the faults of the first."

On leaving his brother's printing-office, he could not find work in Boston and started for New York, thence for Philadelphia, which became his city of adoption. He arrived in a pitiable plight, in workmen's clothes, soaked with rain, having rowed the boat during the crossing. He had little money left in his pocket, yet he wished to pay his passage to the boatman. They refused at first to take it, saying he had paid his way by rowing; but he insisted on giving them his shilling in coppers. "Men," he remarked, "are sometimes more generous when they have little than when they have much; perhaps to prevent people from suspecting how little they have." He made his entry into the city carrying three loaves of bread which he had just bought, one under each arm and eating the third. He passed thus before the house of his future wife, Miss Read, who was at her door, and thought his appearance extraordinary. He was now seventeen years of

age, and alone in a strange city to make his way in the world.

He found employment with one of the two printers of the city, and soon saw that both knew little of their business. He was noticed by the governor, Sir William Keith. In those new countries there was less distance between the classes than there was in the old countries. The governor, who seemed to take a fancy to him, made him, secretly, fine promises and great offers to induce him to set up for himself. After a year's stay, Franklin paid a visit to Boston to obtain his father's permission to go into business for himself. He was well dressed, he had money in his pocket, which he jingled when he went to see his old comrades in the printing-office of his brother, who never forgave him. His father, who did not think him sufficiently mature, and who distrusted a certain tendency he fancied he saw in him to satire and pamphlet-writing, turned a deaf ear to a letter from Governor Keith, but did not forbid his son to return to Philadelphia. Franklin returned, and, while remaining a journeyman-printer, continued to train himself by study to literary composition; he made friends of certain young men of the city who liked reading, as he did, he knew Miss Read, and paid a little court to her; then, tempted again by the promises of the governor, who talked to him incessantly of setting up in business for himself, he resolved to go to England and buy the outfit for a small printing-office.

He embarked on this first voyage to England at the close of the year 1724, being then nineteen years of age. He found, on arriving, that the pretended letters of introduction given him by Governor Keith were lures or decoys; in short, he had been hoaxed. He found work in the great printing-office of Palmer, then with Watts, perfected himself in his trade, moralised to his comrades, tried to teach them a better hygiene, a more healthy regimen, and preached to them by example. He met a few men of Letters. When "composing," as printer, a book on "Natural Religion," by Wollaston, the idea came to him of writing a short metaphysical "Dissertation" to refute some points in the book. This little work, of which a few copies were printed, brought him into relations with certain freethinking men. In short, during this stay of eighteen months in London he launched himself in more ways than one; he learned from several schools; but especially did he mature quickly in practical knowledge of men and of life.

On leaving Philadelphia he had exchanged promises with Miss Read, whom he expected to marry. One of the errors, the errata of his life, was that soon after his arrival in London he wrote a single letter to this very worthy young girl, telling her that it was improbable he should return to Philadelphia as soon as they had expected. From this indifference it resulted that the young lady, urged by her mother, married another man, was very unhappy, and Franklin did

not marry her till some years later when, her first marriage being dissolved, she had recovered her liberty.

Here a reflection begins to dawn upon us. An ideal is lacking in this healthy, upright, able, frugal, laborious nature of Franklin—the fine flower of enthusiasm, tenderness, sacrifice,—all that is the dream, and also the charm and the honour of poetic natures. In what I have to say of him I shall not assume to depreciate or belittle him in any way; I simply seek to define him. Let us take him in the matter of love. Young, he feels no irresistible, all-constraining sentiment; he sees Miss Read, she suits him; he conceives both respect and affection for her; but all is subordinate to what is possible and reasonable. Arrived in England, having exchanged promises with her, he begins to doubt whether they can be fulfilled; he tells her so honestly, without otherwise showing much grief. "The fact is," he says, by way of excuse, "the expenses I have had to incur make it impossible for me to pay my passage." Later, when he returns to Philadelphia, with good prospects, and sees Miss Read, sad, melancholy, a widow, or nearly so, he returns to her; but not until he has himself missed another marriage, and because he thinks the state of celibacy full of vices and inconveniences. "Marriage, after all," he says, "is the natural state of man. An unmarried man is not a complete human being: he resembles one-half of a pair of scissors without its other half, and conse-

quently, is not even half as useful as if the two were put together."

He tries to correct his first mistake and succeeds. Married at twenty-four years of age, he finds in his wife for many years a tender and faithful companion, who aids him much in the work of his shop. That is his ideal: do not ask more of him. When he is old and in Paris, he spends a day at Auteuil, talking nonsense with Mme. Helvétius; telling her he wished to marry her and that she was very foolish to resolve to be faithful to her late husband, the philosopher. The next morning he writes a very pretty letter to her, in which he pretends that he has been transported in a dream to the Elysian Fields; where he finds Helvétius in person, who has married again, and is much astonished to hear that his former wife on earth persists in being faithful to his memory. While he talks very pleasantly with Franklin, in comes the new Mme. Helvétius, bringing coffee which she has prepared with her own hands:

"Instantly," writes the lively old man, "I recognised her as Madame Franklin, my former American wife. I claimed her; but she said, coldly: 'I was your good wife for forty-nine years and four months, almost half a century; be satisfied with that. I have formed here a new connection which will last through eternity.'— Displeased with this refusal of my Eurydice, I at once resolved to quit those thankless shades and return to this good world to see the sun and you. Here I am; let us avenge ourselves."

All that is gay, a pretty, piquant, social jest, but the lack of sentiment reveals itself.

Also, there is a flower, a bloom, of religion, of honour, of chivalry, which we must not ask of Franklin. He is not obliged to comprehend chivalry, and he gives himself no trouble to do so. When the founding of the Society of the Cincinnati is in question, he opposes it with good reasons, but he makes no reservation in favour of chivalry, considered historically and in the past. He forgets Lord Falkland, that perfect result of delicate and gallant chivalry grafted upon ancient loyalty. He applies to the examination of chivalry a method of moral arithmetic which he is fond of employing, and starting from the principle that "a son derives only half from the family of his father, the other half from that of his mother," he proves by figures that in nine generations (supposing a pure, intact genealogy) there remains in the person who inherits the title of "Knight" only the five-hundred-dozenth part of the original knight or noble. He brings everything down to arithmetic and strict reality, assigning no part to human imagination.

So with religion. He returns to it, after his early freethinking, in a sincere and touching manner. I know no deist who shows a more living sense of faith than Franklin; he seems to believe, on all occasions, in a Providence actually present and perceptible. But there again, what was it that most contributed to bring him back to religion? It was seeing that, during the time when he was decidedly a sceptic, he failed in fidelity to a trust, and that two or three other

sceptics of his acquaintance allowed themselves to do him certain wrongs involving money and integrity. "I began to suspect," he says, "that these doctrines, though they may be true, are not very profitable." Thus he returns to religion through utility. The useful is always, and preferably, his measure.

Franklin is by nature above all the anxieties of a Childe-Harold, all the susceptibilities of a Chateaubriand. We, of the hasty and vivacious French race, would like him to have had a little of ourselves in him. The devotion of a Chevalier d'Assas, the passion of a Chevalier Des Grieux, the folly of Parisina or Ariel, all that is in our thoughts, and we feel that the wings to soar are lacking, at any rate in youth, when a man cannot pass at will from one of these worlds to the other. Nevertheless, let us see Franklin just as he was in his moral beauty, and in his true stature. That judicious, firm, shrewd, comprehending, honest man will be unshaken, immovable, when injustice assails him and his compatriots. He will also do all in his power, for years, with the mother-country, to enlighten opinion, and prevent extreme measures; until the last instant he will strive to bring about a reconciliation founded on equity. One day when a man of great influence in England, Lord Howe, gave him hopes (on the very eve of the rupture), a tear of joy rolled down his cheek; but when injustice hardened itself and an obstinate pride plugged its ears, then the purest and most invincible of passions swept him

along, and he who thought that "all peace is good and all war evil" was for war then, for the holy war of a legitimate and patriotic defence.

In the ordinary current of his life Franklin is ever the most gracious, smiling, and persuasive of utilitarians. "I approve, for my part, that people should amuse themselves now and then with poesy," he says, "as much as is needed to perfect their style; but not beyond that." Yet he himself, without being aware of it, has a form of imagination and a way of saying things that make him not only the philosopher, but sometimes the poet of common sense. In a little Diary of travel, written at the age of twenty (1726) during his return from London to Philadelphia, speaking of I know not what atrocious description that was given him of a former Governor of the Isle of Wight, he says:

"What surprised me was that the old fellow of a porter spoke to me of the governor with a perfect notion of his character. In a word, I believe it to be impossible that a man, had he the craft of a devil, can live and die a wretch and yet conceal it so well that he could take with him to the grave the reputation of an honourable man. It will always happen that, by one accident or another, he is unmasked. Truth and sincerity have a certain natural and distinctive lustre which can never be counterfeited; they are like fire and flame, no one can paint them."

Pointing out a method of economy that would ensure having money at all times in our pocket—a method that consists (independently of the fundamental counsel of work and honesty) in "spending always a penny less than the net profit," he adds:

"In that way thy flat pocket will begin to swell and will no

longer cry out that its belly is empty. Thou wilt not be insulted by thy creditors, or harassed by want, gnawed by hunger, or numbed by nakedness. The whole horizon will shine brighter to thine eyes, and pleasure will gush from the innermost recesses of thy heart."

If ever the doctrine of economy came into the world with contentment and mirth and a sort of familiar poesy of expression, we must look for it in Franklin. An inward warmth of feeling animates his prudence; a ray of sun lights up and cheers his honesty.

Franklin returned to Philadelphia from his first journey to England in 1726; and, after a few attempts, he established himself as a printer at twenty-one years of age, first with a partner, but soon alone. He makes a sort of moral inventory of himself at this decisive moment of his life. He enumerates his principles, from which he never afterwards departed. "I was convinced that *truth, sincerity,* and *integrity* in the relations between men are of the first importance for the happiness of life, and I formed the written resolution, which is always placed in my Diary-book, to practise them as long as I live." To this real and fundamental probity, Franklin took pains to add the legitimate social profit that accrued from it. But, while observing the constant little cares that he gave and the minute pains he took to make himself more and more virtuous within, and more and more considered without we must never separate in him the appearance from the reality. He was, if you will, the shrewdest and most prudent of honest men, but also the least hypocritical.

"In order to insure," he says, "my credit and my reputation as a merchant, I took care to be laborious and economical not only in reality, but also to avoid all appearance to the contrary. I clothed myself simply; I was never seen in any of the resorts of idle company. I joined no fishing or hunting parties; it is true that a book sometimes debauched me from my work; but that was rarely, and at home, without causing scandal. To show that I was not above my trade, I sometimes took to the printing-office, through the streets on a wheelbarrow, the paper I had bought in the shops.

Franklin's wheelbarrow has sometimes been cited in contrast with his future destiny; but, as we see, it was a legitimate little device on his part, rather than a necessity of his position.

About this time, Franklin formed a club of the educated young men whom he knew, to discuss and improve themselves in culture of mind and in the search after truth. After writing some articles in the "Journal" already established in Philadelphia, he was not long in having a newspaper of his own, the "Gazette," which he printed; thus obtaining the principal means of influence and of civilisation in the city and in the province.

In order to judge Franklin as a literary man, an economist, and inventor of several useful inventions, we must picture clearly to ourselves this young man of his time and place, in the midst of compatriots who were rough, unequally educated, and little trained in the arts of life. Franklin appears among them as an indefatigable educator and civiliser. In the first articles that he wrote weekly for the "Gazette," he endeavoured to polish manners and customs, to cor-

rect bad and uncivil habits, coarse jesting, visits too long and intrusive, and persistent popular prejudices inconsistent with good practices. We must not ask of these Essays a general purpose that they have not. Later, in diplomatic relations, Lord Shelburne when negotiating with Franklin observed that his principal characteristic in dealing with public affairs was, "not to embarrass himself by trying to bring about events, but only to profit well by those that happened," adding that he had "the science of expectant medicine." In the first part of Franklin's life, although he seems full of inventions and a great promoter of all matters of public utility, he is so only to the degree that is immediately applicable; he never goes beyond that limit; he is practical in all things.

"It is an amazing thing," remarks a writer of the Franklin school, "that one of the passions that men have less of and which it is most difficult to develop in them, is the passion for their own comfort and convenience." Franklin did all he could to inoculate his compatriots with that passion, and make them take an interest in the useful arts and thus ameliorate their lives. He contributed not only to found, by subscription, the first public library, the first Academic Society (which became the University of Pennsylvania), and the first hospital, but he showed men how to warm their homes by economical stoves, how to pave their streets, how to sweep them by day, and how to light them by night with lamps of con-

venient shape. What he did not invent himself, he perfected; and the idea, passing through him, became simplified, yet more ingenious. When entering into such minute details, he feels the need of excusing himself; but at the same time he thinks that nothing is to be despised that is serviceable every day to everybody. "Human happiness is less the result of great prizes of good fortune, which rarely come, than of the many little enjoyments that reproduce themselves daily."

During these years of his youth and of the first half of his life, not a single project of public interest in Pennsylvania came up that his hand was not in it. His fellow-citizens knew this well, and when some new enterprise was proposed to them for subscription their first words were: "Have you consulted Franklin? what does he think of it?" And he, before proposing anything directly, was careful to prepare the public mind by writing something about it in his "Gazette." He avoided signing his name, however, in order to spare the self-love of others. No one has ever used a newspaper better or more salutarily than he. We may say that he was wily for the public good. Counsellor, teacher, benefactor of his city, such, in short, was his rôle before the collision of the colonies with the mother-country.

He takes pains to inform us that this application to the general good was carried on without injury to his private interests; in no wise does he think that in

order to perform public duties well we should be content to do our own badly. He attained, by laborious ways, to an honest fortune and to an independence that placed him in a position to follow his tastes for study and for the sciences.

During his whole life, Franklin made a steady and progressive advance, which was guided by an unvarying plan. When about twenty-four years of age, he conceived the bold and difficult project of attaining to *moral perfection*, and to do so he set to work like a skilful physician who, by means of very simple and right measures which he combines, obtains quite often great results. He explains to us in detail his almost commercial method: his memorandum book of thirteen virtues (temperance, silence, order, resolution, economy, etc.), and the little synoptical list, on which he specified his faults every day of the week, occupying each week with a single virtue especially; then passing to another, so as to make the course complete in thirteen weeks; making four courses of virtue a year:

"Just," he says, "as a man who has a garden to weed does not undertake to pull up all the weeds at once (which would exceed his capacity and strength), but he works on one patch first, and having finished that he goes to the next—in the same way do I hope for the encouraging pleasure of seeing on my pages the progress made in a virtue, in proportion as I free those pages from their bad points, until at last, after a certain number of turns I shall have the happiness of seeing my note-book clean and clear."

It is difficult for us not to smile in seeing this Art of Virtue thus set up for his individual use, and to hear

him tell us, moreover, that at this same epoch in his life, he had conceived the plan of forming, among the men of all nations, a "party united for virtue." There, indeed, Franklin shows that he had his hidden corner of dreams and of excessive moral ambition, from which the most practical of men are not always exempt. He was much struck with the immense changes in the world that a single man of reasonable capacity can bring about when he applies himself with continuity and fixity to his object, when "he makes it his business." In his hours of speculative musing he very willingly let his thoughts run, sometimes in the moral order, sometimes in the natural science order, to conjectures and hypotheses that were very bold and very far-reaching. But for him who mastered his passions and governed himself by prudence, such vagaries of speculation, such escapes into space, had no dangers; he returned, in the practice of daily life, to experience and to the possible; in which his disciples, as we shall see, did not always follow him.

Nothing, therefore, came to mar or thwart his early and well-considered plans for the amelioration of the moral and social state of his compatriots. Among his means of action, we must place the Almanacs that he published from 1732, under the name of Richard Saunders, otherwise called Poor Richard. Franklin had by nature the popular gift of thinking in proverbs and of speaking in parables. I will here recall

only a few of the best-known proverbs that he coined and put in circulation:

"Idleness is like rust, it consumes faster than use wears out. The Key that is used is always bright."

"Little as you may love life, do not waste time; it is the stuff life is made of."

"A labourer on his legs is taller than a gentleman on his knees."

"If you are labourers you will never die of hunger: hunger may look in at the door of the man who works, but it cannot enter."

"The second vice is lying; the first is to run in debt. Lies mount astride of debt and ride it."

"Lent is very short for those who have to pay at Easter."

"Pride is a beggar that cries as loud as want, and is much more insolent."

"Poverty often deprives a man of all spirit and all virtue; it is difficult for an empty sack to stand up straight."

More than one of these proverbs, both in meaning and in turn of phrase, recall Hesiod and La Fontaine; but especially Hesiod, speaking in prose and in modern fashion, among a rude and practical race which had never been visited by the Muses.

As for the fables and tales, they were an habitual form of speech or writing with Franklin; everything supplied him with matter or pretext. In his old age, he scarcely spoke consecutively unless he were telling a tale. Some of these tales when written down may seem rather childish; others are very pleasing; but most of them lose much in not coming from his half-smiling lips.

He began to enter public affairs, properly so-called, in 1736, when thirty years of age, as secretary of the General Assembly. It was for him a very important

position in itself, and also for the printing matter that it procured for him. The first year he was elected without opposition; but the second year an influential member spoke against him, and declared that he should oppose and thwart him in future. Franklin imagined a means of winning him over without solicitation or baseness, namely, to make this member do him a little service:

"Having heard," he says; "that he had in his library a very rare and curious book, I wrote him a line in which I expressed my great desire to look over the volume, and asked if he would do me the favour to lend it to me for a few days. He sent it to me immediately, and I returned it at the end of the week, with another note, warmly expressing my gratitude for the favour. The next time we met in the Assembly he spoke to me (which he had never done before), with much civility; and after that he always showed an eagerness to serve me on all occasions, so that we became great friends and our friendship lasted till his death. This is only another proof of the truth of an old maxim that I once learned, which says: 'He who has once done you a service will be more inclined to do you another, than the man whom you have yourself benefited.'"

It was by such degrees of moral sagacity, of judicious conduct, of rectitude and skill, love for the public weal and for good understanding in all things, that Franklin prepared himself, little by little, and without knowing it, for the important rôle that events were reserving for him. But, worthy and respected as he was among his own people, it would have been difficult to divine in him, at this date, the man of whom Pitt was one day, in defending him from insult, to say so magnificently in the House of Lords, that he

was a man "who did honour not only to the English nation, but to human nature.'

Franklin's "Memoirs" are full of interest for all those who have had a toilsome early life, and have experienced the difficulties of existence and the lack of generosity in men, but who are, nevertheless, not embittered, not posing as misanthropes, nor as virtue unrecognised; not spoiled either, nor fallen into the corruption and intrigues of self-interest; men who have preserved themselves equally from the evil of Jean-Jacques and from the vice of Figaro, who, wise, prudent, discreet, starting from hard and honest gains, putting cautiously, but boldly if need be, one foot before the other, have become, in various degrees, useful, honourable, and even important members of the great human Company—to all such, and to all whom the same circumstances await, these "Memoirs" are a source of observation that will always be applicable, and of truth that will always be felt.

I am not writing the life of Franklin; it is written by himself, and where he stops we must look for its continuation in the excellent work of Jared Sparks, which ought to be translated into French. My desire is to show the philosopher and the American statesman in his early conditions, with an existence already so full before his arrival and his favour in France, and before he embraced Voltaire. It is thus only that we shall feel how different were those two men and the two races which they represent.

Franklin was nearly seventy-one years of age when he came to France at the close of 1776. He was fifty-one when his compatriots in Philadelphia chose him, in 1757, to be their agent in England. This second time that he went there he appeared as the most distinguished man of his province, already known in Europe for his experiments in electricity, dating ten years back. The mission with which he was charged, and which is not to be confounded with his later political mission in 1764, was wholly special and provincial. William Penn, the coloniser and legislator of Pennsylvania, in the Charters and fundamental agreements which he had obtained from the Crown, or had himself granted to the immigrant population, had carefully stipulated for his own private interests and those of his family, together with the civil and religious liberties of the colonists. His sons, owners of large territorial possessions, who were invested with the extraordinary right of appointing the governors of the province, assumed that their estates were exempted from taxation. The Assembly of Pennsylvania opposed so flagrant an inequality, and Franklin was commissioned by that body to go to England and plead the cause of the public rights against the sons of William Penn, by making an appeal to the officers of the Crown. The interest of Pennsylvania, at that time, was that the Crown should intervene more directly than it did in colonial administration, and that it should free the province from the species

of petty feudality that entailed these profits on one family.

During the last years of his stay in Philadelphia, Franklin had become more and more respected in the province. Elected a member of the Assembly, of which he had long been secretary, charged, moreover, with the organisation and management of the Posts, he had rendered great services to the English army in the war with Canada (1754). Interposing between the Assembly, not warlike because it was chiefly composed of Quakers, and the English general, he had procured carts and provisions, made contracts with markets, in short, had constituted himself purveyor for the army, without other motive than that of saving the province from military exactions, and doing his duty as a faithful subject. The disasters that followed had not surprised him; knowing the presumptuous character or the incapacity of the leaders first employed in the expedition, he had predicted the result.

After his arrival in England, he was consulted on this war with Canada, and on the means of better conducting it. He did not see Mr. Pitt, the prime minister, who was then a personage of great importance and seldom accessible, but he communicated with his secretaries, and did not cease to press upon them the necessity and the urgency of taking Canada from France; pointing out at the same time the ways and means of succeeding. He even wrote a pamphlet

on the subject. To take and keep Canada was to him as favourite a thought as the destruction of Carthage was to Cato; he urged it not only as a colonist, but as an Englishman of Old England, ardently working for the future grandeur of the empire. At this period of his life Franklin knew no difference between his two countries; he had a consciousness of the growing and illimitable destinies of the young America; he saw it, from the St. Lawrence to the Mississippi, peopled within a century by British subjects; but, if Canada remained French, this development of the British Empire in America would be constantly held in check, and the Indian tribes would find a powerful auxiliary, always ready to gather them into confederation, and hurl them on the colonies.

In seeing the ardour that Franklin puts into this question, which he considers national, we understand how, fifteen years later, when the rupture came between the colonies and the mother-country, he had a moment of keen anguish, when, without being shaken in his determination, he shed tears; for he had, in his most virile years, himself contributed to consolidate England's grandeur; and he could say, in his last letter to Lord Howe (July, 1776):

"Long did I endeavour, with sincere and indefatigable zeal, to preserve from all accident the glory of that beautiful and noble porcelain vase, the British Empire; for I knew that, once broken, the pieces could never keep even a part of the strength and value they had when they formed a single whole, and that a perfect reunion could hardly be hoped for in coming years."

That word "hardly" [*à peine*], which seems to have a slight gleam of hope, was in reality, at that date, merely a politeness.

But, in 1759, Franklin was still only an Englishman from the other side of the Atlantic, to whom the mother-country did honour by a distinguished welcome. In the intervals of leisure left him by the incidents and prolonged delays of his mission, he cultivated the sciences and learned men. He visited Scotland in the summer of 1759, and there became intimate with men of the first order, with whom that country was then well provided, forming an intellectual group of a distinct character, composed of the historians Robertson, David Hume, Ferguson, etc.:

"In short, I must say," wrote Franklin on his return from this journey to Edinburgh, "that the six weeks I have just passed are, I think, those of the fullest and the *most dense* happiness I have ever had at any time in my life. The agreeable and instructive society that I found there has left so sweet an impression on my memory, that if strong ties did not draw me elsewhere, I think that Scotland would be the country I should choose in which to spend the rest of my days."

David Hume, writing to thank Franklin for sending him, at his request, instructions as to the making of lightning-rods, ends his letter thus:

"I am very sorry that you think of soon quitting our hemisphere. America has sent us many good things, gold, silver, sugar, tobacco, indigo, etc.; but you are the first philosopher and the first really great man of Letters whom we owe to her. It is our fault that we do not keep you; which proves that we are not in agreement with Solomon, that 'wisdom is far above gold'; for we take good care never to send back an ounce of the metal when we have once laid our fingers on it."

Franklin wittily replies to this letter, in the style of an economist:

"Your compliment of *gold* and *wisdom* is very kind to me, but a little unjust to your country. The different value of each thing in different parts of the world is in proportion, as you know, to the demand for it. They tell us that in Solomon's time gold and silver were in such abundance that they had no more value in his land than the stones in the street. You have here to-day precisely such an abundance of wisdom. You should not therefore blame your countrymen if they do not desire more than they have; and, if I have a little, it is only just that I should take it where, by reason of rarity, it will probably find a better market."

We can readily understand Franklin's liking for the Lettered world of Edinburgh; he had in him a philosophy both penetrating and circumspect, subtle and practical, and an industrious as well as lofty observation. As author of moral Essays, and also as experimenter and man of science, as a clear and simple expositor of his methods and his results, it certainly seems as if Scotland were his intellectual country. He wrote something on "Old Scotch Melodies" and the delightful impression they made upon the soul. He tried, in a very acute analysis, much as a Dugald Stewart might have done later, to explain why those old melodies are so charming. His remarks on this subject bear the stamp of that ingenious simplicity of thought which is the sign of a truly philosophical mind. Nevertheless, in the matter of music, as in all else, it is evident that what Franklin likes is simplicity; he wants music conformed to the

sense of the words and the feeling expressed, and this with as little effort as possible. But, there is a kingdom of Sounds, as there is one of Colour and of Light; and this magnificent kingdom in which the Handels and the Pergolèses rise and soar, as in the other we see the Titians and the Rubenses float and play, Franklin was not formed to enter; he who invented and perfected the harmonica remained in the principles of elementary music. In nothing did he like luxury; and in the fine arts luxury is richness and talent itself.

In like manner, in religion, and in the worship of public adoration which the peoples render to Divinity, there is, if I may dare to say so, a kingdom of Prayer and of Hymns. There, again, Franklin tried to apply his method. Taking the Book of Common Prayer, used by Protestants, he endeavoured to make it, according to his ideas, more reasonable, more moral; and for that purpose he cut out, and corrected certain parts; he laid hands on the Psalms, he abridged David. He who in certain respects seemed so truly to feel, and even imitate in a way, the parables of the Gospel, he does not feel nor understand fully either Job or David. Their obscurities impede him; their words that issue partly from the clouds bewilder him; he requires that all be comprehensible; he levels, as best he can, Mount Sinai. And yet, the moment we accept, as he had the wisdom to do, public worship and adoration, are there not in the soul of man emotions, in human destiny

mysteries and depths which call for and justify the thunders of the Divine word? However that may be, he could not, and did not, admire sublime disorder, and he did his best to prevent the lightnings of Moses from descending upon us, precisely as he had warded off the other lightning with his rods. Job, David, Bossuet, old Handel, and Milton go far beyond Franklin, and yet, leader and zealous introducer of the rival and practical race, if you let him alone he will gently compel them to reckon with him.

Here would be the place, were I fitted for it, to speak of him as a man of science, and to mark his position and, so to speak, his level among great men. An excellent English critic (Jeffrey) dropped a word on that point in the only direction in which writers like myself can approach it. Franklin was not a geometrician, he was solely a physicist, a natural philosopher; his works in that line have a character of simplicity, of delicate and searching analysis, of easy and decisive experiments, of clear reasoning within the mental compass of every one, with luminous, gradual, and convincing demonstration. He goes as far as he can with the instrument of common language, and without employing calculations and formulas. Science with him is inventive, and he makes it familiar. "A singular felicity of induction," said Sir Humphry Davy, "guides all his researches, and by very small means he establishes great truths." He did not restrain himself in conjectures and hypotheses whenever

natural ones presented themselves to his mind; and he allowed himself to make very bold ones to explain some of the great phenomena of nature; but he did so without attaching other importance to them than that which could properly be granted to speculative conjectures and theories.

The turn of his mind, however, always brought him back to the practical, and to the use that could be made of science for the safety and comfort of life. Thus it was that his general discoveries in electricity led to the invention of the lightning rod. He never, at any time, crossed the Atlantic without devoting himself to experiments on the temperature of sea-water, or on the swiftness of vessels; experiments destined to be of use long after him to future navigators. He liked above all, and searched for, applications of science for domestic use. While guaranteeing buildings from lightning, he invented for the interior of houses convenient, economical chimneys that did not smoke. The scientific and learned man in Franklin always remembered the handicraftsman, the workman, and the industry. Man has been defined in general in many ways, of which some are regal and magnificent; but as for him, he limited his definition to that of "an animal who makes tools."

He had faith in experimental science and in its discoveries; he often regretted, towards the end of his life, that he was not born a century later, that he might have enjoyed all that would then have been discovered.

"The rapid progress that *true* science makes in our day," he wrote to Priestley, February 8, 1780,

"gives me sometimes a regret that I was born so early. It is impossible to imagine the degree to which the power of man over matter may be carried in a thousand years. Possibly men will have learned how to disengage from great bodies their weight, and give them an absolute lightness which will facilitate transportation. Agriculture may diminish its toil and double its product. All diseases may, by sure means, be prevented or cured, without excepting even that of old age, and our life might prolong itself at will to greater length than before the Deluge."

Franklin, in speaking thus, may have smiled a little, but it is very certain that he believed some of these things at heart. When he does dream he has vast horizons, and just such dazzling perspectives; it is the style of illusion of many men of science. One part at least of his predictions is now on the road to being realised.[1] At the same time, he has the good sense to regret that moral science is not in a parallel path towards perfection, and that it makes but little progress among men.

After a stay of five years in England, having obtained, if not all the points of his demand, at least the recognition of the essential principles for which he had

[1] Written in 1852, seventy-three years after Franklin wrote to Priestley. What would Sainte-Beuve (not to speak of Franklin) say now, fifty-three years later, to deep-sea cables, wireless telegraphy, electricity lighting our houses, driving our carriages, cooking our dinners! The spirit of Franklin's predictions is more than fulfilled, but his own works are not obsolete. The "Franklin stove"—a portable open fireplace, made of iron, in which logs of wood are burned, as on a hearth,—are still much used in country regions.—Tr.

come to plead in the name of his countrymen, Franklin embarked, at the end of August, 1762, for America. At the moment of setting foot on the vessel he wrote to Lord Kames, a Scotch friend of his:

"I cannot leave this happy isle and the friends I have made here, without extreme regret, though I go to a country and to a people that I love. I depart from the old world to the new, and I fancy that I feel somewhat as a man does in passing from this world to the next: grief at departure, dread of the passage, hope in the future."

Franklin returns often to this idea of death, and always in a gentle, almost smiling manner. He considered it as a crossing, to be sailed in obscurity and doubt as to its length; or else as the sleep of a night, as natural and necessary to the human constitution as the other sleep. "We shall rise fresher in the morning."

Reaching America, welcomed by his countrymen, and caught again into the current of public affairs, Franklin often gives a glance of remembrance to those years in England, so well employed, and where friendship and science had been so much to him. He feels at once, on arriving among his own people in Philadelphia, the difference of the two societies and the two cultures. He writes to Miss Mary Stevenson, his charming and serious pupil, in whose family he had lodged while in London:

"Of all the enviable things that England possesses, that which I envy most is its society. How that little island which, if compared with America, is like a stepping-stone laid across a brook, scarcely

higher above the water than is needed to keep the shoe dry, how, I say, does that little island manage to collect, almost in every neighbourhood, more sensible, intelligent, and elegant minds than we can gather through hundreds of leagues of our best forests?"

He ends, however, by expressing a hope that the arts, ever tending westward, would some day cross the great ocean, and, after they have first provided for the necessities of life, would begin to think of its embellishment.

Franklin, elected member of the Assembly of Pennsylvania, and director-general of Posts, passed more than two years in taking a most active part in local affairs. In the Assembly he was leader of the Opposition; that is to say, he continued to speak for the interests of the population against the privileges of the proprietors, the sons of Penn, represented by the governor. He was appointed, in the end, President of the Assembly. At the same time he paid attention to his administration of the Posts, and formed a military association to control some serious disturbances that took place. The dwellers on the frontiers, often exposed to the attacks of Indians, and grown fanatical in their desire for vengeance, made attacks themselves, unexpectedly, and exterminated whole tribes of inoffensive and friendly Indians. Such summary executions, when the idea of them arises in America, (and it does arise sometimes) meet but little hindrance, because of the lack of an armed force. Franklin contributed at that time, with all his ability and all his en-

ergy, to make up for the powerlessness of the governor. He felt that the weak side of democracy and of the form of government that sprang from it lay there; he says it, again and again, to the end of his life and after America has given herself her definitive Constitution (1789): "We have guarded ourselves against an evil to which old States are very subject, namely, the excess of power in governments; but our present danger seems to be the lack of obedience in the governed."

Finally, in the midst of the political contests, already very keen, which Franklin had to sustain in the Assembly and in the elections of Philadelphia, came the news of the famous Stamp Act (1764). In drawing up that bill, the English minister made it very plain that he claimed for the British Parliament the right of taxing the colonies at will, and of imposing duties upon them without their consent. In this conjuncture Franklin was again chosen by his countrymen to be their agent and organ to the Court of London and the British ministry. He left Philadelphia, surrounded by a cavalcade of honour composed of three hundred of his fellow-citizens, who accompanied him to the harbour, where, leaving behind him many devoted friends, and also a goodly number of political enemies, he embarked once more for England (November, 1764). He did not foresee that he was to stay there ten years; which, with his preceding sojourn, made in the end a residence of not less than fifteen years.

Here the scene enlarges, and the subject takes a far

wider range. In Franklin's preceding mission the matter concerned little more than a family suit between the colony and the sons of the coloniser. In the new mission the envoy of Pennsylvania was soon to become the agent and *chargé d'affaires* of the other principal colonies, and to express in their name the prayers and complaints of a nation, very humble at first and very filial, but which already feels its strength, and is determined not to give up its rights. America, at this date, was like a robust adolescent, who is slow in saying to himself, and even in comprehending that he desires to be completely independent: instinct, long repressed, whispers it to him, and at last the day comes when, rising in the morning, he suddenly feels himself a man.

During the ten years residence of Franklin in England, the question passed through many phases, many successive variations, before the final explosion; but we can say, nevertheless, that it never went backward. There was no moment when England was sincerely inclined to yield, or the colonies to give way. The merit of Franklin in this long and ever-memorable struggle was that he never went beyond the spirit of his countrymen but, at that great distance, was able to divine it, and serve it in the exact measure that was suitable. His perspicacity must have early enlightened him as to the inevitable future; but, none the less, he continued his course to the end, and, with unshaken patience, kept his footing,

and drew from the slightest circumstances whatever might conduce to peace and open the way to a settlement. In all that concerns him individually, three principal facts stand forth, and show him publicly before the world with his qualities of strength, prudence, and lofty firmness.

The first of these circumstances was his interrogation before the House of Commons in February, 1766. The new ministry of the Marquis of Rockingham seemed more mildly disposed towards America and ready to give her satisfaction by repealing the Stamp Act. Franklin was summoned before the House to answer any and all questions that might be put to him, either on this particular point or on the American question in general, by the present or former ministers, or by any other member of Parliament. His attitude, his self-possession, the promptitude and propriety of his answers, his profound knowledge of the subject and of the political consequences it involved, his intrepidity in maintaining the rights of his countrymen, his expressions full of point and character, all contributed to make this examination one of the most significant of historical acts and a great prognostic verified by events:—"If the Stamp Act be rescinded," he was asked at the close, "would that induce the Assemblies of the Provinces to recognise the right of Parliament to tax them, and to annul their resolutions?" "No," he replied, "never!"—"Is there no means of compelling them to annul those resolu-

tions?"—"None that I know of. They will never do so, unless constrained by force of arms."—"Is there no power on earth that can bring them to annul them?"—"No power, however great it be, can bring those men to change their opinions." With regard to the determination taken by the colonies not to receive any article of English manufacture until the revocation of the taxes, he was asked: "In what were the Americans accustomed, up this time, to take pride?"—"In making use of the fashions and the articles of English manufacture."—"And in what do they now put that pride?"—"In wearing, and wearing-out, their old clothes, until they themselves know how to make new ones."

The second famous circumstance in which he stood upon the scene was very different in character. Franklin, closely as he approached, in his literary and scientific form of mind, his friends of the school of Edinburgh, had something in him by which he differed from them notably. He had passionate convictions to such a degree that the cold and sceptical David Hume thought he discovered in him a spirit of faction, almost bordering on fanaticism. That means simply that Franklin had a political religion which he believed in ardently. In the interests of his cause, and by an action that had more of the citizen than of the gentleman in it, he thought it his duty to send to friends in Boston confidential letters, which had been placed in his hands with some mystery; letters which

proved that the violent measures adopted by England were advised by certain men in America, especially by the Governor of Massachusetts, Hutchinson, and by the Lieutenant-governor, Oliver. The effect of these letters, which were circulated through the country, produced before the Assembly at Boston, and recognised to be in the handwriting of the Governor and of the Lieutenant-governor, was prodigious, and led to a Petition to the King, transmitted through Franklin, in defence of which he was summoned on a fixed day (January 29, 1774) before the Privy Council.

It was there that his enemies awaited him; for by this time he had many; passions on both sides were at their height. A crowd of privy councillors, who seldom attended, were invited as if to a fête; there were not less than thirty-six present, besides a vast audience. After a speech made by Franklin's lawyer in support of the Petition, a speech that was scarcely heard because the lawyer happened to be hoarse on that day, the solictor-general, Wedderburn, afterwards Earl of Londsborough, rose to speak. Putting aside the matter of the Petition, he turned upon Franklin, who was in no way in question: for nearly an hour he insulted him in regard to the letters, declaring him to be an incendiary setting fire and flame between the two countries. He mingled ridicule and sarcasm in a way to make all the members of the Council roar with laughter. Franklin sat unmoved, received the broadside without betraying the slightest emotion,

and retired silently. The next day he was dismissed from the office of director of the Posts in Pennsylvania, hints having been given to him more than once to send in his resignation; to which he replied that it was with him "a principle never to ask, never to refuse, and never to resign an office." In this case, he preferred to lay upon his adversaries the responsibility of the act by which they struck him.

This scene before the Privy Council left a deep impression upon Franklin's soul. He took pleasure in noting that one year, to a day, from that outrage, on the 29th of January, 1775, he received a visit at his house in London from Mr. Pitt, then Lord Chatham, who had made a motion in the House of Lords on affairs in America: "The visit of so great a man, and for an object so important," he says, "flattered my vanity not a little; and this honour gave me all the more pleasure because it occurred one year, to a day, after the other minister had taken such pains to insult me before the Privy Council." On the day of the affair before the Council Franklin was dressed in a complete suit of Manchester velvet. It is related that when presented at the Court of France, four years later, during the first solemn functions of his fortunate and honoured negotiation, he put on designedly the same ceremonial suit, to avenge it and cleanse it, in some degree, from the insults of Mr. Wedderburn. The truth of this statement, which has passed into a sort of legend, has been questioned. I am inclined

to think it true, and to suppose the suit to be the one mentioned by Mme. Du Deffand in a letter of March, 1778: "Mr. Franklin was presented to the king; he was accompanied by some twenty insurgents, three or four of whom wore uniforms. Franklin wore a greyish velvet suit, white stockings, his hair long, spectacles on his nose, and a white hat under his arm." It was after one of his decisive interviews with the French ministry, or after this first presentation at Court, that Franklin wrote: "That suit is henceforth precious to me; for I wore it when so grossly insulted by Wedderburn, and now, in the same suit, I have taken my complete revenge."

The third circumstance in which, as I have said, Franklin made a brilliant appearance upon the scene during his mission to London, was the day on which Lord Chatham made and upheld his motion in the House of Lords, February 1, 1775. Franklin was present at the debate as spectator. A fresh and unexpected insult was levelled at him by one of the speakers, Lord Sandwich, who denied that the proposition could come from an English peer, and

"then," says Franklin, "turning to me who was leaning on the bar, he added that he believed he had before his eyes the person who had drawn it up, one of the most cruel and malevolent enemies the country had ever had. This outburst fixed the eyes of a great number of the lords upon me; but, as I had no reason to take it to myself, I kept my countenance as motionless as if my face were made of wood."

When it became Lord Chatham's turn to reply, he expressed himself about Franklin in the words I have

already quoted, and so magnificently that the latter had difficulty, as he owns, in keeping the same indifferent air and wooden face with which he had just confronted insult.

After this stay of ten years in London, and when the inevitable rupture took place, Franklin returned to America (March, 1775). Henceforth, the "beautiful porcelain vase," as he called it, was broken, and he mourned it. But the man of Old England no longer existed in him. Hostilities began, blood flowed, he lost the last spark of his affection for the country of his fathers; in his acts, in his thoughts we now see only the man and the citizen of the new continent, of that young, emancipated, vast empire, of whose people he is among the first to sign its declaration of independence, and to foretell its grandeur, without one wish to look back or to recede. The position of the United States is critical, but the energetic good sense of Franklin tells him that the hour has come for prudence itself to be rash.

Franklin at this date is seventy years of age. After more than one year passed in active labours and in the most fatiguing missions, having been sent when the winter was scarcely over to rouse Canada, if possible, to insurrrection, he is chosen to go to the Court of France to negotiate with and strive to rally it to the support of the American cause. He sailed, October, 1776, on a sloop of war (not neglecting to make on the voyage, according to his usual custom, ob-

servations on marine temperatures), and disembarked upon the coast of Brittany in the Bay of Quibéron, whence he made his way by land to Nantes, arriving in Paris at the end of December. Here it is that, for us, the story of the patriarch of Passy begins; but we could not rightly understand him if we had not seen him as a young man, and then as a mature man, in the completeness of his character and in some of its principal traits.

When he arrived in Paris at the end of December, 1776, his coming, which was destined to become a sojourn of eight and a half years, was instantly made the topic of all conversation. It was not his first visit to France: he had already spent some weeks in Paris in 1767, and again in 1769. Of his first journey he gave an account in a lively letter to his young friend, Mary Stevenson, in which he remarks chiefly upon external matters, the roads, the politeness of the people, the manner of dressing the hair, the rouge worn by women, the mixture of sumptuousness and poverty in the buildings. He had been to Versailles, he tells her; he was presented to the king; he had seen him eat his dinner; Louis XV had spoken to him:

"Enough said about all that," he writes, jestingly, stopping himself as if about to say more; "for I would not have you think that I was so pleased with this king and queen as to lessen the consideration I have for ours. No Frenchman can surpass me in the idea that my king and queen are the best in the world, and the most amiable."

"Travelling," he says in the same letter, "is a means of prolonging

life. It is scarcely a fortnight since we quitted London, but the variety of scenes we have passed through makes that time seem equal to six months spent in one place. I myself have been subjected to greater changes in my person than I should have made in six years at home. I was not in Paris six days before my tailor and hairdresser had transformed me into a French gentleman. Only think what a figure I make with a little bag of hair behind and my ears uncovered! They tell me I have grown twenty years younger and that I have quite an air of gallantry. . . ."

This Franklin of 1767, thus curled, powdered, and dressed like a Frenchman, differed totally from the purely American Franklin who reappeared in 1776, to ask for the support of the Court of France, in a wholly republican suit and a sable-fur cap, which he kept on his head. It was thus that he first appeared in the salons of the gay world, at Mme. Du Deffand's, beside Mmes. de Luxembourg and de Boufflers. "Picture to yourself," he writes to a friend, "a man as gay as ever, as strong, as vigorous, merely a few years older; very simply dressed, wearing thin grey hair quite flat and coming out below my one *coiffure*—a handsome fur cap, which covers my forehead down almost to my spectacles." However, he did, soon after, suppress the fur cap and continued to the last bareheaded, his hair very spare on the crown, but falling on both sides of his head and neck almost to the shoulders; in short, exactly such as his portraits have fixed indelibly in our memories.

Franklin had long understood French; he set himself to study it in 1733, and could read all books in our language very easily; but he spoke it with difficulty,

and this had been an obstacle to his knowing more of French society during his stay in Paris in 1767 and 1769. Mme. Geoffrin, to whom he had a letter from David Hume, had not been able to initiate him, though his arrival was much noticed by scientific men. We find in the "Secret Memoirs," said to be written by Bachaumont, under date of September, 1767: "M. Franklin, that natural scientist, so remarkable for the experiments in electricity which he has made in America, and brought to the most surprising point of perfection, is in Paris. All the scientific men are eager to see and to confer with him."

During the first period of his stay, beginning in 1776, Franklin was compelled to conquer this difficulty of conversation and, in spite of his advanced age, he succeeded by his perseverance. Nevertheless, a few blunders on his part are recorded. Being present one day at a session of the Academy, and understanding the French language but slightly when declaimed, he determined, in order to do the civil thing, to applaud whenever he saw Mme. de Boufflers give signs of approbation; but it so happened that, without knowing it, he applauded, louder than any one, the parts that praised himself.

Franklin's feelings towards France varied during his long career, and even during the period of his last sojourn; it is only just to take account of these differing periods, lest we should think him a scoffer, and ungrateful. A British patriot by origin, and an American

of Old England, he began by not liking France, considering her an enemy, as much as he could so consider a nation composed of his fellow-beings. He distrusted France, and during his stay in London, when M. Durand, the French minister plenipotentiary, showed him esteem and tried to draw from him information on the affairs of America, he held himself aloof: "I imagine," he wrote (August, 1767) "that that intriguing nation would not be sorry to meddle in our affairs, and to blow the fire between Great Britain and her colonies; but I hope that we shall furnish her with no such opportunity."

The opportunity had now come, the way was open ten years later, and it was Franklin himself who came to solicit our nation and its king to take part in the struggle and to profit by it. In the early days of his sojourn he is sensitive to annoyances, to absurdities; he finds himself the object not only of admiration but of sudden infatuation, and at first he does not like it. He is besieged by solicitations, by entreaties of all sorts. A generous fever had taken possession of our nation; men were fighting in America, and every soldier wanted to rush there. It was all the rage to go and draw your sword for the "insurgents," as it was, later, to rush to California for gold. No one would believe that Franklin had not come to solicit, first of all, military assistance and engage officers.

"These demands," he wrote, "are my perpetual torment. . . . Scarcely a day passes that I have not a number of such visits of solici-

tation, to say nothing of letters. They look up all my friends and weary them to weary me. The head functionaries of all ranks in all departments, ladies great and small, not counting professional place-hunters, importune me from morning until night. The noise of each carriage entering my courtyard suffices to alarm me. I fear to accept an invitation to dinner, so nearly sure I am to meet some officer or some friend of an officer who, after a glass or two of champagne has put me into good humor, begins his attack. Happily, in my sleep I do not dream of these disagreeable things, otherwise I should come to dread what are now my sole hours of repose. . . . And all those who are recommended to me are 'experienced officers—brave as their swords—full of courage, talents and zeal' for our cause; in a word, real Cæsars, each of whom would be an inestimable acquisition for America. . . ."

In these first days Franklin, no doubt, did not rightly estimate the impulse that swept the nation along, and was presently to impel the Government itself to a course by which America was so greatly to profit. Little by little, however, he becomes acclimated; his little banter lessens, the slight irony ceases, and after a year or two spent in France, he is wholly conquered by the general spirit of the nation:

"I am charmed," he writes to Mr. J. Quincy (April, 1779), "with what you say of the French politeness and civil manners shown by the officers and crews of the fleet. The French, in this respect, greatly surpass the English. I find them the most agreeable nation in the world to live among. The Spaniards are thought to be cruel, the English haughty, the Scotch insolent, the Dutch stingy, etc.; but I think that the French have no national vice attributed to them. They have certain frivolities, but those hurt no one except themselves. To dress the hair so that no man can put a hat on his head and therefore carries that hat under his arm, and to fill the nose with snuff, may be called absurdities, but they are not vices; they are merely the results of the tyranny of fashion. In short, nothing is lacking in the character of a Frenchman of all that goes to make a charming and honourable man. He has only a few trifles the more, which we could well do without."

When he quitted France, in July, 1785, Franklin was wholly one of us; he repaid us the hospitality he had received and for the popularity by which he was surrounded, from the first to the last day, by feelings of affection and reciprocal esteem. We may say of him that he was the most French of Americans.

I insist upon this point because to detach such or such a passage from his letters, without distinguishing the times at which they were written, might lead us to infer quite the contrary. In politics, I cannot follow the progress of his negotiations in the complicated circumstances through which he led them; such an analysis would require a long chapter. I shall insist only on this one important point: Franklin was in no way ungrateful towards France. From the moment that the treaty of alliance was concluded, he had but one answer to all the overtures made to him to listen to proposals from England: "We cannot negotiate without France." America had been a submissive daughter until the day when she emancipated herself from England, but in vain did the latter secretly recall her and endeavour to tempt her in underhand ways; America was now a faithful spouse. Such was the principle that Franklin professed on all occasions, public or private; and it drew upon him in America the reputation of being too French. But he believed, contrary to his distinguished colleagues (such as Mr. Adams), that Americans could not express too openly their feelings of gratitude to France, and to her young

and virtuous king. He who is not given to the misuse of words, nor to exaggeration, goes so far on this point as to say:

"If this article" (on continuing the war conjointly with France, and not making a separate peace) "did not exist in the treaty, an honourable American would cut off his right hand rather than sign an agreement with England which was contrary to the spirit of such an article."

At a certain moment negotiations were opened with England with the knowledge and consent of France; France, on her side, opened parallel ones. Each of the two allies thought it wisest to seek to make their treaties of peace separately; promising to inform each other before their final conclusion. Here alone we have the right to notice that the American commissioners, to the number of five or six, among them Franklin, rushed their treaty through the last conferences, and did not communicate to the French minister, M. de Vergennes, the preliminary articles decided upon, though not yet ratified. M. de Vergennes complained to them of this infraction of their former agreement, and even of the instructions they had received from Congress, and Franklin admitted that there had been a want of courtesy. The fact was that a rather singular distrust felt by the English negotiators, the cause of which it would take too long to explain here, had crept of late into the minds of the American commissioners, and had made them disregard polite-

ness. Nothing, however, in the articles agreed upon was of a nature prejudicial to France: all was well, except the formality which had been omitted. Franklin, more French in mind and inclination than his colleagues, and suspected of being so, thought it best not to separate from them on this occasion; and he was charged with the duty of repairing the ill-effect of this irregularity with M. de Vergennes and Louis XVI. In this he seems to have succeeded almost completely, and, what he was least concerned about, his position at the Court of France and the affectionate consideration he enjoyed from all, were in no way impaired.

I hasten now to speak of his philosophical and social character which specially interests us to-day. Franklin had influence upon us; he had more than he sought to have. No one ever understood the difference between young and old nations, between a virtuous and a corrupt people better than he. He repeated, many and many a time: "None but a virtuous people are capable of liberty, all others are in need of a master: revolutions cannot take place without danger when the peoples have not sufficient virtue." He said it of England; could he have failed to think it of France? When, towards the close of his life, he heard of the first events of July, '89, he felt as much distrust and doubt of them as hope; the first murders, certain "circumstances" by which the French Revolution was accompanied from the beginning, seemed to him "grievous, afflicting":—"I fear," he says, "that the

voice of philosophy will have difficulty in making itself heard through the tumult."—"Purify, but not destroy" was one of his maxims, and he plainly saw from the beginning it would not be followed in France.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that during his residence in Paris, he did, in his privacy at Passy, influence many of the eminent men who took part soon after in the great Revolutionary movement; and that he contributed to give them more confidence and boldness in their purposes:—"Franklin," says Mallet du Pan, "said more than once to his pupils in Paris that whoso would transport into the body politic the principles of primitive Christianity would change the whole face of society." He is one of those who have advanced with utmost conviction the doctrine of secularising Christianity, and thus obtaining, if possible, good and useful results upon earth. But to take Christianity and drag it so vehemently in that direction is to alter and curtail that which hitherto has been its essence, namely, abnegation, the spirit of sacrifice, and patience founded on immortal expectations. However that may be, the idea of *work and peace,* which, in spite of the checks that it receives from time to time, seems destined to rule more and more all modern societies, owes much to Franklin.

He visited Voltaire during the last journey that the latter made to Paris (February, 1778), where he died. The two patriarchs embraced, and Franklin requested Voltaire to give his blessing to his grandson. It is

probable that he knew but little of Voltaire in all his works, and took him merely for the apostle and propagator of tolerance. But such a scene, with the sacramental words pronounced by Voltaire, "God and Liberty!" resounded far and near, and spoke vividly to the imaginations of men.

I like to believe that Franklin, could he have followed his own inclinations solely, and chosen from among us the person of his preference and his ideal, would rather have embraced M. de Malesherbes, "that great man," as he calls him, who came to see him at Passy, and who, renouncing public life and amusing himself with great plantations, was anxious to obtain through him the trees of North America, not yet introduced into France.

Established at Passy in a beautiful house with a garden, enjoying a charming neighbourhood, Franklin usually, at least during the first years and before his health failed, dined out six days of the seven, reserving Sundays for the Americans, whom he entertained at home. His more especial friends were, among other well-known personages: Turgot, the *good* Duc de La Rochefoucauld, Lavoisier, the society that surrounded Mme. Helvétius at Auteuil, the Abbé Morellet, Cabanis, etc. He went always once a year to Moulin-Goli, to stay with M. Watelet; and he paid a certain visit to Mme. d'Houdetot at Sannois, the sentimental memory of which has been preserved. But these excursions were rare; for, independently of his functions

as minister and negotiator, he filled the offices of "merchant, banker, admiralty judge, and consul." His countrymen found it more economical to use him, without a secretary, in these employments; which condemned him to a very sedentary life during the day. He compensated himself for this drudgery at night, in a friendly and familiar society for which he was so well fitted. He preferred, as a general thing, to listen rather than speak; and certain women of society could be named who, having gone to some salon out of curiosity to meet him, complained of his silence. He had his times and seasons. These intervals were followed by charming awakenings. When he talked, he liked to go to the end of what he had to say, without interruption. The play of wit, the tales and fables of which he was prodigal at such times, have been in part preserved and depict him to us with his own peculiar stamp. He had a kindly irony. One of his most charming correspondents in England, Miss Georgiana Shipley, to whom he had sent his "Dialogue with Gout" and other nothings that he amused himself in writing and then in printing himself, reminded him of the delightful and serious hours she had formerly passed in his society, in which she had "acquired such taste for playful and reflective conversation" [*pour la conversation badinante et réfléchie*]. Those words, which she put in French, give a good idea of Franklin in his ordinary life.

Franklin's Correspondence during these years is most

agreeable and pleasant reading; the perfect equilibrium, the justness, the absence of all evil passions, all anger, the good use he learns to make of even his enemies, an affectionate feeling that mingles with his exact appreciation of things and which banishes their dryness, a lofty sentiment wherever such is needed, a certain smiling air shed over all, make these letters a real treasury of morality and wisdom. Brought into comparison with Voltaire's Correspondence, that of Franklin gives birth to many thoughts; all is healthy, honourable, and as if vitalised by a constant and lively serenity; he called ill-humour "uncleanliness of soul."

More than once he rises to heights; the consciousness of the reality and ardour of his human affection suggests to him a species of poetry:

"I must soon quit this scene," he wrote to General Washington (March, 1780), "but you may live long enough to see our country prosper, as it cannot fail to do, in a rapid and astounding manner, when once the war is over—like a field of young Indian corn, that too prolonged fine weather and too much sun have withered and discoloured, and which, in that weak condition, being buffeted by storms of rain and hail and lightning seemed threatened with entire destruction, yet, when the tempest had passed, it recovers its fresh verdure, lifts its head with new vigour, and rejoices the eyes, not of its possessor only, but of all who pass that way."

Is not that a comparison which, by the sweetness of its inspiration and the breadth of its imagery, recalls the Homeric comparisons of the Odyssey? Franklin, when old, read the poets very little; one of them, however, by his nature, his simple grace, the recti-

tude of his sentiment, found the way to his heart: this was William Cooper, the humble poet of moral life and reality. The noblest eulogy that could be made of that poet—of whom we have not the counterpart in our literature—was written by Franklin in a few lines.

While Franklin was thus corresponding with friends in America and in England and with his absent daughter, regretting the joys of his family hearth, but anticipating for his country great prospects for the future, he was popular in France : he was, in fact, the fashion. His portrait in medallions, in busts, and engravings was seen everywhere; it was worn in rings and bracelets, on canes and snuff-boxes. Beneath the engraved portraits were the famous lines addressed to him by Turgot:

"Eripuit cœlo fulmen, sceptrumque tyrannis."
("From heaven he took the lightning, and the sceptre from tyrants.")

Franklin blushed at these lines, and he blushed sincerely; he would greatly have preferred that what he considered "extravagant" praise of him should be suppressed, for it did, in fact, exaggerate his rôle. But he had to do with a monarchical nation which likes above all things that some one person shall be held to do everything, and which needs to personify its admiration in a single name and a single glory.[1] In

[1] Strange that Sainte-Beuve should give this reason ; it would seem, rather, that in the tumult of French souls conscious that some change

sending this portrait to his friends in America, he called attention, by way of excuse, to the marked characteristic of the French nation of carrying eulogy to extremes, so that ordinary, simple praise becomes almost censure, while excessive praise, in turn, ends by being without significance. To a M. Nogaret, an indefatigable rhymester now totally forgotten, who asked his advice on a translation into French of Turgot's line, Franklin replied with much frankness:

PARIS, 8 March, 1781.

"MONSIEUR:

"I have received the letter you did me the honour to write to me on the 2nd of this month, in which, after overwhelming me with a deluge of compliments which I can never hope to deserve, you ask my advice on your translation of a Latin line that has been applied to me. If I were, what I really am not, sufficiently conversant with your excellent language to be a competent judge of its poesy, the idea that I am the subject of it would prevent me from expressing any opinion. I content myself with saying that it attributes far too much to me, particularly in the part relating to tyrants. The Revolution has been the work of a great number of brave and capable men, and it is fully honour enough for me if I am granted a small part in it."

All that he says on this subject in his letters (and he recurs to it at various times) is of pure good sense, in a tone more dignified than scornful, and without false modesty. Franklin is one of those men who, while honouring humanity and liking to look upward toward heaven, has no aspiration to be taken for an angel.

must come to their nation and yearning for it, they clung with a species of infatuation to the man who personified to them a successful revolution on the highest plane—where, alas for the world! they did not follow.—TR.

Extracts from his "Private Journal" are often quoted in relation to schemes, more or less fantastic and chimerical, that were communicated to him as a common meeting-point, by inventors of projects, machines, systems, or constitutions. All the fools and all the dreamers seem to have set one another on to make this sensible man, coming from afar, their confidant and judge. Among those who submitted to him their ideas or their works, there came one day a certain unknown natural philosopher who was no other than Marat. On another occasion, an author, whose name is not given, but who is thought to have been Thomas Paine, sent him the manuscript of an irreligious work: suppose, if you prefer to do so, that this author, about whom there is uncertainty, was a Frenchman, a philosopher, a pupil of the school of Holbach, or even of that of Auteuil—Volney, for instance, submitting to Franklin the manuscript of his *Ruines*. Franklin replies by a letter, which I shall give entire, because it expresses better than anything I could say the true relation in which he stands with the philosophers of the eighteenth century, and the point at which he separates from them:

"I have read your manuscript with some attention. By the argument it contains against a special Providence,—though you grant a general Providence,—you sap the foundations of all religion: because, without the belief in a Providence who knows, watches, and guides, and can favour some in particular, there is no motive for worshipping a Divinity, for fearing to displease him, or imploring his protection. I shall not enter into any discussion of your principles, although you seem to

desire it. I shall merely, for the moment, give you my opinion, which is that, although your arguments are subtle and may prevail with certain readers, you will never succeed in changing the general sentiments of humanity on this subject; and if you print that work the consequences will be much odium heaped upon yourself, great injury to you and no benefit to others. He who spits against the wind spits in his own face. But, supposing you succeed, do you imagine that any good will result? You may, yourself, find it easy to live a virtuous life, without the help given by religion, you who have a clear perception of the advantages of virtue and the disadvantages of vice, and who possess sufficient strength of resolution to make you capable of resisting all common temptations. But consider how numerous is that portion of humanity which is composed of weak and ignorant men and women, of the inexperienced and thoughtless youth of both sexes, who have need of the motives of religion to turn them from vice, to encourage them to virtue and retain them in the practice of it until it becomes *habitual*—which is the great guarantee of safety. Perhaps you yourself owe to it originally—I mean to your religious education—the habits of virtue of which you now justly boast.

"You could easily display your excellent talents for reasoning on a less hazardous subject, and by so doing obtain a rank among our most distinguished authors: for, among us, it is not necessary, as it is among the Hottentots, that a young man in order to be admitted into the company of men should give proofs of his virility by beating his mother. I advise you, therefore, not to try to unchain the tiger, but to burn this writing before it is read by any one else. In that way, you will spare yourself much mortification from the enemies you will create, and also, perhaps, much regret and repentence. If men are wicked with religion what would they be without it? This letter, as I think, is a proof of my friendship; I will therefore add no other protestation, but sign myself simply: wholly yours."

Among the philosophers of renown in the eighteenth century, I see none but Montesquieu who would have thought thus; but Franklin expresses it in a manner more affectionate, more emotional, more paternal, than Montesquieu would have done.

If all those who conversed with Franklin at Passy

had truly understood his precepts and his measures, they would have thought twice before undertaking in the Old World a universal recasting. At the same time, I must add (even if some contradiction be found in it) that it was difficult for those who listened to him not to take fire, not to be tempted to reform society radically; for he was himself, in his general way of thinking and presenting matters, a great, too great a simplifier. This practical man had nothing in him that discouraged a Utopia; on the contrary, he rather invited it by the novelties and facilities of the outlook he opened towards the future. He gave, in talking, a desire to apply his ideas, but he did not give in equal measure to those who listened to him (the Condorcets and the Chamforts, for instance,) his temperament, his discretion in details, and his prudence.

A witty critic has very well defined him as the "godfather of a future society"; but I do not know how that same critic could have found means to join the name of M. de Talleyrand with that of Franklin: those two names must swear at seeing themselves thus associated! Franklin, in the midst of his shrewdness and ability, is always upright and sincere. Lord Shelburne had sent his son, Lord Fitzmaurice, to see him; after the young man's second visit, Franklin writes in his Journal (July 27, 1784):

"Lord Fitzmaurice came to see me. His father having asked me to give him such advice as I thought might be useful to him, I took occasion to tell him the old story of Demosthenes replying to the man

who asked him what was the first essential in oratory? 'Action.' —And the second? 'Action.'—And the third? 'Action.' I told him that had usually been interpreted as meaning the action of an orator, his gestures in speaking; but that I thought there was another form of action more important for an orator who wanted to persuade people to follow his advice, and that was a consistency and a deportment in the conduct of life which should impress on others an idea of his integrity as well as of his talents; and I added that that opinion once established, all difficulties, delays, oppositions, which ordinarily have their cause in doubts and suspicions, would be forestalled; and that such a man, though he might be a very second-rate orator, would nearly always obtain the advantage over the most brilliant orator who had not the reputation of sincerity. . . ."

This was all the more appropriate to the young man because his father, Lord Shelburne, gifted with many talents, had the reputation of being the very opposite of sincere. In all things, Franklin wanted first the essential, the base, the foundation, convinced that that foundation would be made manifest and that the solid respect due to it must bear fruit.

After a stay of eight years in France he returned to America, being then seventy-nine years of age. Suffering from calculus, he could not bear the motion of a carriage; a litter of Queen Marie Antoinette, drawn by Spanish mules, took him from Passy to the port of Havre, where he embarked. He lived five years longer, in Philadelphia, and died on the 17th of April, 1790, at eighty-four years of age. His return to his country, the honours he there received, the slight vexations (for such there are in every life) that he bore without showing them, his domestic happiness in his garden, under the shade of his mulberry trees, beside

his daughter, with his six grandchildren playing at his knee, his thoughts more and more religious as years advanced upon him—all these things make the most beautiful and perfect end and crown of old age that the mind can imagine. His Correspondence in these years does not cease to be interesting and lively; it is fed to the last by the same sentiments. Among various passages I have selected the following as well expressing that mixture of serenity and gentle irony, of human experience and hope, which formed his habitual character. It is from a letter addressed to his old friend, Mary Stevenson, now become Mrs. Hewson:

"I have found," he writes from Philadelphia, May 6, 1786, "my family in good health, in good condition as to fortune, and respected by their fellow-citizens. The companions of my youth are in truth, nearly all gone; but I find an agreeable society among their children and grand-children. I have enough public affairs on hand to keep me from *ennui*, and with them private amusements, such as conversation, books, my garden, and cribbage. Reflecting that our market is as abundantly supplied as the best of private vegetable gardens, I am in process of transforming mine, in the middle of which stands the house, into lawns and gravel walks, with trees and flowering shrubs. Sometimes we play at cards in the long winter evenings, but just as one plays chess, not for money, but for the honour or pleasure of battling with one another. This will not seem a novelty to you, for you will remember how we played together in this way during that winter at Passy. It is true that I have, now and then, little twinges of remorse in reflecting that I lose time so idly; but another reflection comes to comfort me and murmurs in my ear: 'Thou knowest that the soul is immortal: why then art thou niggardly in this matter of a trifle of time? hast thou not a whole eternity before thee?' So, being easily convinced and, like many other reasonable beings, satisfied with a small reason when it is in favour of my desire, I shuffle the cards and begin a new game."

Letting his thoughts dwell on the hopes and fears, the many and diverse chances of happiness or misfortune which brighten or temper family joys, he says, elsewhere, quoting the words of a religious poet, Dr. Watts :

"He who brings up a numerous family, so long as he is there, living, to look after it, offers himself, it is true, as a 'target for grief'; but also he has greater opportunity for pleasure. When we launch upon the Ocean our little flotilla, bound and freighted for different ports, we hope for each vessel a lucky voyage; but contrary winds, hidden sand-banks, tempests, and enemies have a share in the disposition of events; and although there may result a mixture of mistakes and disappointments, nevertheless, considering the risks on which we can have no insurance, we ought to esteem ourselves happy if some of our ventures return to port."

His ideas of death had never varied for many years, and his hope became more vivid, more keenly felt, as he approached his end. He considered death a second birth: "This life is an embryonic state, a preparation for life. A man is not wholly born until he has passed through death." The peaceful end of his old friends who had lived righteous lives seemed to him a foretaste of the happiness of another life. The recent discourses of Herschel appeared, he thought, to call us to a future and sublime voyage of celestial discovery through the spheres.

By taking him away at that date and thus sparing him two or three more years upon earth, Providence saved him from the horror of seeing those he had best known and loved during his stay in France put to a

violent death—the *good* Duc de La Rochefoucauld, Lavoisier, his neighbour at Passy, Le Veillard, and so many others all guillotined or massacred in the name of principles he had so long approved and cherished. Franklin's last thoughts would then have been darkened by a funeral veil, and his serene soul, before the rebirth he hoped for, would have known in one day all bitterness.

Madame Geoffrin.

Madame Geoffrin.

AFTER all that I have said of the women of the eighteenth century, I should leave too great a gap if I did not speak of Mme. Geoffrin, one of the most celebrated, and whose influence was of the greatest. Mme. Geoffrin wrote nothing that has been published except four or five letters; a quantity of her sayings both apt and piquant have been quoted; but they would not suffice to keep her memory alive. That which characterises her particularly and causes her to be remembered by posterity, is her salon, the most complete, the best organised, and, if I may say so, the best governed salon of her day, the best established that there has been in France since the founding of salons; that is to say, since the hotel Rambouillet. The salon of Mme. Geoffrin was one of the institutions of the eighteenth century.

There are persons who doubtless imagine that it suffices to be rich, to have a good cook, a comfortable house in a good quarter, a great desire to see society and much affability in receiving it to make for themselves a salon. They succeed only in gathering a crowd pell-mell, in filling their salon, not in

creating it; and if they are very rich, very active, much impelled by the sort of ambition that desires to shine, and are at the same time well informed as to the list of invitations to issue, and determined, at any cost, to receive in their houses the kings or queens of the season, they may obtain the glory which a few Americans obtain every winter in Paris: they can have brilliant *routs* to which people rush and pass on, and forget the winter after. What a distance between this process of invasion and the art of real establishment! That art was never better understood or practised than in the eighteenth century, in the bosom of that peaceful, regular society; and no one carried it farther along, conceived it on a grander scale, or applied it with greater perfection and finish of detail than Mme. Geoffrin. A Roman cardinal would not have put into it more diplomacy, more subtle and gentle skill than she bestowed upon it for thirty years. In studying it closely we are more than ever convinced that there is always a reason for a great social influence; and that under these famous powers which are summed up for us in a single name, there was much toil, much study and much talent; in the present case of Mme. Geoffrin, we must add, much good sense.

Mme. Geoffrin appears from the first as an old woman; her youth disappears in a far distance that we do not seek to penetrate. *Bourgeoise,* and very *bourgeoise* by birth, born in Paris in the last year of

MADAME GEOFFRIN.

After the painting by G. Staal.

the seventeenth century, Marie-Thérèse Rodet was married, July 19, 1713, when fourteen years old, to Pierre-François Geoffrin, a substantial citizen, a lieutenant-colonel of the National Guard of those days, and one of the founders of the Manufactory of looking-glasses. A letter of Montesquieu, written in 1748, shows us Mme. Geoffrin at that date, assembling choice company at her house, and already the centre of a circle which for twenty-five years was to last and increase. Whence came this person so distinguished and so skilful, who, by her birth and position in the world, did not seem destined for the part she played? What was her early education? The Empress of Russia, Catherine II, having put this question to Mme. Geoffrin herself, received in reply a letter which ought to be added to all that Montaigne has said on education:

"I lost," she says, "my father and mother when in my cradle. I was brought up by an old grandmother who had much intelligence and a sound head. She had very little education; but her mind was so bright, so adroit, so active, that it never failed her; it took the place of knowledge. She talked so agreeably of things she knew nothing about, that no one wished her to know more; and when her ignorance became too visible, she got away from it by jests that disconcerted the pedants who had tried to humiliate her. She was so content with her lot that she considered knowledge a very useless thing for a woman. She used to say: 'I have done so well without it, that I have never felt the need of it. If my grand-daughter is stupid knowledge will make her self-conceited and intolerable; if she has intelligence and sensibility she will do as I have done: she will make up by cleverness and feeling for what she does not know; and when she comes to have more reason she will learn that for which she has the most aptitude, and learn it quickly.' So, in my childhood, she had me

taught simply to read; but she made me read a great deal; she taught me to think and to reason; she taught me to know men, making me say what I thought, and telling me the judgment she formed upon them. She obliged me to give her an account of all my impulses and all my feelings; and these she corrected with such gentleness and grace that I never hid anything of what I thought and felt from her; my interior was as visible to her as my exterior. My education was continual. . . . . ."

I said that Mme. Geoffrin was born in Paris: she never left it but once, in 1766, when sixty-seven years old, to make her famous journey to Warsaw. Moreover, she never quitted her own quarter; even when she drove into the country to visit a friend, she always came back at night and never slept away from home. She was of the opinion that "there is no better air than that of Paris"; and wherever she might have gone she would always have preferred her gutter of the rue Saint-Honoré, as Mme. de Staël preferred hers of the rue du Bac. Mme. Geoffrin adds one more name to the list of Parisian spirits who have been endowed in the highest degree with the social and affable virtues, and who are thus so easily civilisers.

Her husband seems to have counted for little in her life, except to provide her with the fortune which was the starting-point and the first instrumentality of the consideration she was fitted to acquire. M. Geoffrin is represented to us as old, and silently present at the dinners that were given in his house to men of Letters and of science. They tried, so the story goes, to make him read some book of history, or of travels;

but as he always took up the first volume without perceiving that there were others, he contented himself by saying that "the work was interesting, but the author repeated himself a little." It is told that reading a volume of the Encyclopædia (or of Bayle), which was printed in two volumes, he read across the page from one column to the other, which caused him to say that "while he thought the work very able, it seemed to him a little abstruse." These, however, are tales readily told of the effaced husband of a celebrated wife. One day, a foreigner asked Mme. Geoffrin what had become of the old gentleman who used always to be at her dinners and whom he no longer saw there. Mme. Geoffrin replied: "That was my husband; he is dead."

Mme. Geoffrin had one daughter, who became the Marquise de La Ferté-Imbault, an excellent woman, it was said, but without the moderation, good sense, and perfect decorum of her mother, who used to say: "When I consider her I feel like a hen which has hatched out a duckling."

Mme. Geoffrin, therefore, derived her training from her grandmother, but she seems to me the only one of her race. Her talent, like all true talent, was wholly personal. Mme. Suard represents her as gently imposing respect "by her tall figure, her silvery hair covered with a head-dress tied under the chin, her dress, very noble and decent, and her air of good judgment mingled with kindness." Diderot, who had

just been playing a game of piquet with her at Grandval, Baron d'Holbach's place, where she was dining (1760), wrote to a friend:

"Madame Geoffrin appeared very well. I have always observed the noble and simple taste with which that woman dresses: to-day, she wore a simple material, austere in colour, wide sleeves, linen of the finest and smoothest, and everywhere the utmost cleanliness."

She was then sixty-one years old. This old woman's attire, so exquisite in its modesty and simplicity, was peculiar to her, and recalls, in a way, the similar art of Mme. de Maintenon. But Mme. Geoffrin was not obliged to husband or repair the remains of a beauty that still shone by flashes in a half-light; she was frankly old at an early age, and she suppressed the autumn season. While most women are concerned to retreat in good order, prolonging their age of yesterday, she took the bull by the horns and installed herself, without haggling, in the age of the morrow. It was said of her that "all women dress as they did yesterday; no one but Mme. Geoffrin dresses for to-morrow."

Mme. Geoffrin is thought to have taken her lessons of the great world from Mme. de Tencin, and to have formed herself in that school. The assiduity of her visits being remarked, Mme. de Tencin is quoted as saying to a knot of her intimates: "Do you know what the Geoffrin comes here for? She comes to see what she can collect out of my property." That "property" was worth some trouble, for it consisted

of Fontenelle, Montesquieu, Mairan, and others of their kind.

Mme. de Tencin is much less remarkable as the author of romantic and sentimental tales (in which she may have been assisted by her nephews) than for her spirit of intrigue, her wily manœuvres, and for the boldness and range of her opinions. A woman of little worth, some of whose actions came near to being crimes, those who approached her were captivated by her gentle and almost kindly air. When her interests were not concerned, she could give safe and practical advice, by which others profited in their lives. She knew the end of the game in everything. More than one great statesman, even in our own day, would have been the better for keeping before his eyes this maxim, which she often repeated: "Men of intelligence make many mistakes in conduct because they never believe the world to be as stupid as it is." Nine of her letters that were published (all being addressed to the Duc de Richelieu during the campaign of 1743), show her to us in all the manœuvres of her ambition, working to seize power for herself and her brother the cardinal, during that brief moment when the king, emancipated at last by the death of Cardinal de Fleury, had not yet taken a formal mistress. Never has Louis XV been judged more profoundly, or with more clear-sighted and better-founded feelings of contempt than in those nine letters of Mme. de Tencin. As early as the year 1743, this

intriguing woman has flashes of perception that pierce the horizon: "Unless God puts his hand in it visibly," she writes, "it is physically impossible that the State should not be overthrown." It was this able mistress whom Mme. Geoffrin consulted, and from whom she received good counsel, notably that of never refusing any connection, any offer of friendship; for if nine out of ten brought her nothing, the tenth might compensate for all; "and besides," said this woman of resource, "everything comes into use in a household when we ourselves know how to handle the tools."

Mme. Geoffrin did, in part, inherit the salon and methods of Mme. de Tencin; but in confining her ability to the sphere of private life she singularly extended it, and in a path that was wholly honourable. Mme. de Tencin moved heaven and earth to make her brother prime-minister: Mme. Geoffrin, putting politics aside, and never meddling in matters of religion, became herself, by her infinite art, by her spirit of consistency and propriety, a sort of skilful administrator or, as one might say, a great minister of society, one of those ministers who are all the more influential because they are less proclaimed and more permanent.

From the first, she conceived the idea of this machine called a salon to its full extent, and was able to organise it completely, with the gentlest and most imperceptible machinery, but skilful and kept in repair by continual watchfulness. She not only sought and

welcomed men of Letters, properly so-called, but she was solicitous for artists, sculptors, and painters, seeking to bring them all into relations with one another and with people of the great world; in short she conceived the Encyclopædia of the century in action and in conversation around her. Every week she gave two dinners; one, on Monday, to artists: at that could be seen Van Loo, Vernet, Boucher, Latour, Naltier, Vien, Lagrenée, Soufftot, Lemoine, some amateurs of distinction and patrons of art, some literary men, like Marmontel, to sustain the conversation and make a bond between the rest. Wednesday was the dinner for the men of Letters; at which were present d'Alembert, Mairan, Marivaux, Marmontel, the Chevalier de Chastellux, Morellet, Saint-Lambert, Helvétius, Raynal, Thomas, Grimm, d'Holbach, and Burigny of the Academy of Inscriptions. One woman only was admitted besides the mistress of the house, and that was Mlle. de Lespinasse. Mme. Geoffrin had noticed that several women at a dinner distracted the guests, broke up and scattered conversation; and what she liked was unity—remaining herself its centre.

After dinner the house continued open for other guests, and the evening ended by a little supper, very simple but very choice, composed of five or six intimate friends, among them certain women, the flower of the great world. Not a foreigner of distinction lived in, or passed through Paris without aspiring to be received by Mme. Geoffrin. Princes came there as

private individuals; ambassadors never stayed away when once they had a footing there. Europe was represented in the persons of Caraccioli, Creutz, Galiani, Gatti, Hume, and Gibbon.

We can now see that of all the salons of the eighteenth century that of Mme. Geoffrin was the most complete. It was more so than that of Mme. Du Deffand who, after the defection of d'Alembert and others consequent upon the departure of Mlle. de Lespinasse, had lost nearly all the men of Letters. The salon of Mlle. de Lespinasse, save for six or seven earnest friends, was made up of persons little bound together, taken here and there, but assorted by that brilliant woman with infinite art. The salon of Mme. Geoffrin represents, on the contrary, the great centre and gathering-place of the eighteenth century. In its decent conduct, its animated decorum, it makes a counterpoise to the little dinners and licentious suppers of Mlle. Quinault, Mlle. Guimard, and the financial magnates, the Pelletiers and the La Popelinières. Towards its close, Mme. Geoffrin's salon witnessed the rise, in emulation of and slightly in rivalry with it, of the salons of Baron d'Holbach and of Mme. Helvétius, which were composed partly of the cream of Mme. Geoffrin's guests, and partly of certain hotheads whom she had found too excitable to admit to her dinners. The century became, in the end, a little weary of being controlled by her and held in leading-strings; it wanted to speak out loud with joy at heart.

The spirit that Mme. Geoffrin brought into the ordering and management of the little empire she had so broadly conceived was a spirit of naturalness, or correctness, of delicacy, and of refinement, descending to the smallest details; an adroit, active, and gentle spirit. She had caused a plane to be passed over the carvings in her apartment; and it was the same in her moral existence: "Nothing in relief" seemed to be her motto: "My mind," she said, "is like my legs: I like to walk on level ground; and I do not want to climb a mountain for the pleasure of saying when I get there, 'I have climbed this mountain.'" She liked simplicity, and may, on occasion, have slightly affected it. Her activity was of a kind that is chiefly noticeable through good order; one of those discreet activities that act at all points silently and insensibly. Mistress of a household, she had an eye to everything; she presided; she sometimes scolded, but with a scolding that was hers alone; she desired that talk should be stopped in time; she policed her salon. With a single sentence, "That will do," she checked at the right moment conversations that were wandering towards hazardous topics, and heads that were getting heated; the latter feared her, and carried their outbreaks elsewhere.

She held it as a principle not to talk herself, except when necessary; and not to intervene unless at certain moments; and never for any length of time. It was then, however, that she gave wise maxims or told

piquant tales and anecdotes on morals or actions, usually illustrated by some familiar image or expression. All this, however, was chiefly pleasing as it came from her lips; she knew this, and she used to say that she did not wish people "to preach her sermons, tell her tales, or touch her tongs."

Having posed so early as an old woman and as the "mamma" of the persons she received, she found a means of governing, a little trick or artifice, which became in the end a sort of mania. This was to scold; but to scold as a compliment. Not every one who wished could be scolded by her; it was the highest mark of her favour and guidance. He whom she liked the best was the most scolded. Horace Walpole, before he passed with colours flying into the camp of Mme. Du Deffand, wrote the following letter from Paris to his friend the poet Gray:

"(January 25, 1766) Mme. Geoffrin, of whom you must have heard a great deal, is a very extraordinary woman, with more common sense than I have almost ever met with. She has great quickness in reading characters at a glance, much penetration in going to the bottom of each one, and a pencil that never misses a likeness—which is seldom flattering. In spite of her birth and the absurd prejudices in France about nobility, she exacts for herself a great court and a well-maintained respect. She has succeeded in this by a thousand little artifices and many kind offices of friendship; also by a liberty and severity which seem to be almost her only object in drawing society round her; for she never ceases to scold those she has once cajoled. She has little taste and less knowledge, but she protects artists and authors, and she pays court to a small number of great people to gain influence that may be useful to her protégés. She got her training under the famous Mme. de Tencin, who taught her as a rule never to rebuff any one, for, said that clever matron, 'even if nine out of ten would not give

themselves a farthing's worth of trouble for you, the tenth may become a useful friend.' She has neither adopted nor rejected that plan as a whole, but she has kept to the spirit of the maxim. In a word, she presents to us an epitome of empire which exists by means of rewards and penalties."

The office of majordomo of her salon was usually confided to Burigny, one of her oldest friends, and the most scolded of all. When there had been some infraction of the rules, some outbreak of imprudence in speech, she laid the blame on him for not keeping better order.

People laughed, and even joked with her about it, all the while submitting to a rule that was narrow and exacting, though tempered by much kindness and beneficence. This right of correcting she secured to herself by now and then placing in the pocket of a guest some good little pension—not forgetting the annual gift of the velvet breeches.

Fontenelle did not make Mme. Geoffrin the executrix of his will without reason. Mme. Geoffrin, properly observed, seems to me to have been, by the nature of her mind, by the method of her proceedings, and by her class of influence, a female Fontenelle; a Fontenelle more active in beneficence (I shall return to that point later), but a true Fontenelle in caution, in her way of conceiving and regulating happiness, by a manner of speech, familiar at will, epigrammatic and ironical, but without bitterness. She is a Fontenelle who, for the very reason that she is a woman, has more vivacity and more affectionate and kindly impulses.

But, like him, she loved quietude and to walk on level ground. All that was ardent around her made her uneasy; she thought that reason itself was wrong when impassioned. She compared her mind, one day, to "a roll, which unfolds, unrolls by degrees." She was in no hurry to unroll it rapidly. "Perhaps at my death," she said, "the roll may not be wholly unrolled."

That wise slowness is a distinctive trait in her mind and of her influence. She feared too hasty emotions and changes that were too abrupt: "We must not," she said, "pull down the old house before we build the new one." She moderated the epoch, then beginning to be so ardent, as much as she could, and tried to discipline it. It was an offence to her if, at one of her dinners, things were said that might have sent the speakers to the Bastille. Marmontel perceived that he was lowered in her favour after his affair of *Bélisaire*. In short, she continued to represent the spirit, already philosophical but still moderate, of the first half of the eighteenth century so long as it did not cease to respect certain limits. I picture to my own mind this constant care and solicitude of Mme. Geoffrin, by an image: to the bust of Diderot by Falconet she added a wig (a marble wig, if you please).

Her beneficence was as great as it was ingenious; in her it was a true gift of nature: she had "the giving humour," she said. "Give and forgive" was her motto. Benefaction on her part was perpetual. She

could not refrain from making presents to every one; to the poorest man of Letters as well as to the Empress of Germany; and she gave them with an art and a perfection of delicacy which would have made the refusal of them churlish. Her sensibility became perfected by the practice of kindness, and by an exquisite social tact. Her beneficence, like all her other qualities, had something singular and original about it that was hers alone. Many charming, unlooked-for instances of this, such as Sterne would have turned to profit, are told of her; I will relate but one:

It was remarked to her, one day, that everything in her house was perfect, except the cream, and that was not good. "How can I help it?" she said. "I cannot change my milkwoman." "What is there about your milkwoman that you cannot change her?" "Why, I gave her two cows." "A fine reason!" they cried all round her. The fact was, that one day when the milkwoman was weeping in distress at having lost her cow, Mme. Geoffrin had given her two; the extra one to console her for having wept; and from that day the giver felt that she could not change her milkwoman. This is rare, and it is delicate. Many persons would have been capable of giving a cow, or even two; but to keep an ungrateful or negligent milkwoman, in spite of her bad cream, is what few would have done. Mme. Geoffrin did it for her own sake; so as not to spoil the memory of her first kindly action. Just as she scolded, not to correct

but for her own personal pleasure, so did she give, not to make worthy persons happy or grateful, but to content and please herself. Her benefactions were stamped by a certain roughness of humour; she held thanks in aversion: "Thanks," some one said, "caused her a kindly and almost real anger." About this she had a theory which she carried into paradox; she even went so far as to make a formal eulogy of ingratitude. What is very clear is that, even in giving, she chose to pay herself by her own hands, and enjoy *all alone* the satisfaction of obliging others.

Shall I say it? I think I find here, even in this excellent nature, that corner of selfishness and hardness so inherent in the eighteenth century. The pupil of Mme. de Tencin, the friend of Fontenelle, is visible even at the moment when she gives way to an inclination of her heart—she gives way to it, but without warmth, and still arranging all things. We know that Montesquieu also did a fine act of benevolence, after which he escaped abruptly and almost harshly from the thanks and tears of those he had obliged. Contempt for mankind is here shown even in benevolence. Is it taking the right moment to show contempt to choose that in which we uplift men, or touch their hearts, or make them better? In St. Paul's admirable chapter on Charity we find, among other characteristics of that divine virtue: "Charity seeketh not its own; . . . thinketh no evil." Here, on the contrary, this worldly and social benevolence sought its pleasure, its personal

relish and satisfaction, mingling with them a little irony and malice.

I know all that can be said in favour of that respectable and charming virtue, even when it thinks of itself. Mme. Geoffrin, when questioned about it, had a thousand good answers, all as shrewd as herself: "Those," she said, "who seldom oblige, do not need working maxims; but those who oblige often ought to do so in the manner most agreeable to themselves, because we want to do conveniently what we wish to do every day." There is something of Franklin in that maxim; of Franklin correcting and rather blurring the too spiritual meaning of Charity as given by St. Paul. Let us respect, let us honour the natural and reasonable liberality of Mme. Geoffrin; but let us, at the same time, recognise that there is lacking in that kindness and that beneficence a certain celestial fire, just as there was lacking in the whole social spirit and art of the eighteenth century a bloom of imagination and poesy, a depth of celestial light. Never do we see above us the blue of the heavens and the radiance of the stars.

We have now obtained an idea of the form and quality of Mme. Geoffrin's mind. The dominant characteristics in her were justness, fitness, and good sense. Horace Walpole, whom I like to quote as a good judge above suspicion, saw much of Mme. Geoffrin before he belonged to Mme. Du Deffand; he enjoyed her extremely, and always spoke of her as having one of the best heads and best understandings he had ever met;

and also as the person who had the greatest knowledge of the world. Writing to Lady Hervey, after an attack of the gout, he said:

"Paris, October 13, 1765. Mme. Geoffrin came the other evening and sat two hours by my bedside; I could have sworn it was my Lady Hervey, so full of kindness was she. And this together with so much good sense, information, sound advice and timely. She has, especially, a way of reproving you that charms me. I have never in my life seen any one who detects so quickly the defects, vanities, and false airs of others, or who exposes them with such clearness and convinces you of them so easily. I never before liked being reproved; but now, you cannot imagine what a taste I have for it. I have made her my Confessor and Director both, and I begin to believe that I shall be, in the end, a reasonable human being—which I never aimed at being until now. The next time I see her I mean to say: 'O! Common Sense, sit thou there; I have, until now, thought so and so; tell me, is it, or is it not absurd?'—As to all other kinds of sense and wisdom, I never liked them, and now I shall hate them for her sake. If it were worth her trouble to do so, I can assure you, Madam, she might rule me like an infant."

At all times he speaks of her as Reason incarnate. What he says shows us the species of charm, the singular, scolding charm that her common sense exercised around her. She liked to school her company, and she usually made it like its lesson. It is true that if any one did not accept it, if he tried to get away from her desire to advise and reprove him, she was not pleased; and a dry little tone in her voice soon warned him that she was piqued in her foible, in her claim to be mentor and director.

A little note that she wrote to David Hume has been lately printed as a specimen of her way of abus-

ing people when she was pleased with them; I suppress the faults of spelling—for Mme. Geoffrin could not spell, and made no secret of it:

"Nothing hinders you, my big rascal [*mon gros drôle*] from being a perfect dandy but playing stern virtue and not answering the love-letter I sent you by Gatti. In order to have all possible airs you seem to be giving yourself that of being modest. . . ."

Mme. de Tencin called the clever men of her society her "stupids" [*bêtes*]: Mme. Geoffrin continued to treat them as such, with a switch.

She judged her friends, her habitual guests, seriously and with accuracy. Certain scathing remarks that escaped her, not then in jest, have been preserved. It was she who said of the Abbé Trublet when some one spoke of him in her presence as a man of intellect: "He, a man of intellect! he is a fool rubbed with intellect." She said of the Duc de Nivernais: "He is a failure every way, soldier failure, ambassador failure, author failure." Ruthière read aloud in her salon his manuscript "Anecdotes on Russia"; she wanted him to throw it into the fire and offered to compensate him with a sum of money. Ruthière was indignant, and brought forward all the great sentiments of honour and disinterested love of truth: "How much more do you want?" was her only reply. We see that Mme. Geoffrin was gentle only when she pleased; and that her benignity of temper and beneficence covered some inward bitterness.

I have quoted Franklin in relation to her. She had maxims that seemed to come from the same good sense, calculating, ingenious, and wholly practical like his. She had engraved on her card-counters the words: "Economy is the source of independence and of liberty." And also the following: "Never let the grass grow on the path of friendship."

Her mind was one of those keen minds of which Pascal speaks; which are wont to judge at a glance, instantly, and which never return to what they have once been mistaken in. Such minds dread fatigue and *ennui,* and their sound, sometimes penetrating, judgment is not continuous. Mme. Geoffrin, gifted in the highest degree with that sort of mind, differed wholly in this respect from Mme. du Châtelet, for example, who liked to follow up and exhaust an argument. These delicate and quick minds are specially fitted for knowledge of the world and men; they like to let their eyes wander, rather than fix them on anything. Mme. Geoffrin needed, to save her from weariness, a great variety of persons and things. Too much intensity suffocated her; too great duration even of pleasure made it unbearable to her: "Of the most charming society she wanted only just so much as she could take at her own time and ease." A visit which threatened to be prolonged and to last for ever turned her pale as death. Once, when she saw the excellent Abbé de Saint-Pierre settle himself in her salon for a long winter's evening, she felt a momentary

terror; then, inspired by the desperate situation, she drew the worthy man out so skilfully that she made him amusing. He was quite astonished himself, and when, at parting, she complimented him on his conversation he replied: "Madame, I am only an instrument on which you have played skilfully." Mme. Geoffrin was indeed a skilled virtuoso.

In all this, I have simply extracted from and summed up the Memoirs of the time. It is a greater pleasure than people suppose to read over again those authors of the eighteenth century who are called secondary, but who are simply excellent in their sensible prose. There is nothing more agreeable, delicate, and distinguished than the pages that Marmontel devotes in his Memoirs to Mme. Geoffrin, and the sketch of her society. Morellet himself, in speaking of her, is not only an excellent painter but an admirable annalist; the hand that writes is rather heavy, but the pen is clear and fine. None of them, down to Thomas, who was held to be too enthusiastic, fails to give very charming and very happy expression to their sentiments for Mme. Geoffrin. It is often said and repeated that Thomas was bombastic; but we ourselves, in our present style of writing, have become so turgid, so metaphorical, that Thomas, as I reread him, seems to me simple.

The great event of Mme. Geoffrin's life was the journey she made to Poland in 1766, to visit the king, Stanislas Poniatowski. She had known him when

quite a young man, in Paris, and he, like many others, had received her assistance. He had hardly ascended the throne of Poland before he wrote to her: "Mamma, your son is king"; and he begged her earnestly to come and see him. She did not refuse, in spite of her advanced age. Passing through Vienna, she was the object of marked attentions from the sovereigns. It was thought that a small diplomatic mission was slipped into this journey. We have the letters of Mme. Geoffrin written from Warsaw; they are charming; they went the rounds of Paris, and it was not good form in those days to be ignorant of them. Voltaire chose that moment to write to her as to a power, begging her to interest the King of Poland in the Sirven family.

Mme. Geoffrin was so well balanced that this journey did not turn her head. Marmontel, in writing to her, had seemed to think that these attentions shown by monarchs to a private person must make a revolution in her ideas. Mme. Geoffrin recalls him to the true point of view:

"No, my neighbour" (neighbour, because Marmontel had an apartment in the same house) "no, not a word is true of all that; nothing at all of what you think will happen. Everything will remain just the same when I return, and you will find my heart such as you have ever known it, very sensitive to friendship."

Writing to d'Alembert, also from Warsaw, she says,

while congratulating herself (but without intoxication), on her lot:

"This journey ended, I feel I shall have seen enough of men and of things to be convinced that they are everywhere very much the same. I have my storehouse of reflections and comparisons well supplied for the rest of my life. . . ."

And she adds a sentiment as touching as it is noble about her royal pupil:

"It is a terrible position to be King of Poland. I dare not tell him how unfortunate I think him; alas! he feels it himself only too often. All that I have seen since I quitted my *penates* makes me thank God that I was born a Frenchwoman and a private individual."

On her return from Warsaw, where she had been loaded with honours and attentions, she increased in skilful modesty. We may believe that this modesty in her was only a gentle manner, replete with good taste, of bearing her self-gratification and her new fame. But she excelled in such discreet and fitting conduct. Like Mme. de Maintenon, she belonged to the race of the self-glorifying modest people. When persons congratulated and questioned her about this journey, whether she answered them or did not answer, she put no affectation into her words nor into her silence. Never did any one know better than she—this Parisian *bourgeoise*—how to deal with great people, how to get out of them all she wanted without either effacing herself or presuming in any way, simply by keeping, with an

air of ease in all things and to all persons, within the limits of decorum.

Like all great persons she had the honour of being attacked. Palissot tried twice to arraign her on the stage as patroness of the Encyclopædists. But of all these attacks the one Mme. Geoffrin felt most keenly was the publication of the private letters of Montesquieu, which the Abbé de Guasco caused to be printed in 1767, for the purpose of being disagreeable to her. Some of Montesquieu's remarks against Mme. Geoffrin indicate pretty plainly what, indeed, we might otherwise divine, namely: that wherever there are men to be governed there is always something of intrigue and of manœuvring, even when women undertake it. Mme. Geoffrin had sufficient influence to stop the publication, and the passages relating to her were cancelled.

The last illness of Mme. Geoffrin brought about certain singular circumstances. While supporting the *Encyclopédie* with her gifts, she had always kept a corner in her mind for religion. La Harpe relates that she had at her beck and call a Capuchin confessor, a confessor with very wide sleeves for the convenience of her friends who might need them; for if she did not like to have her habitués get themselves put into the Bastille, still less did she like them to die without confession. As for her, while living with the philosophers, she always went to Mass, as if for assignation; and she had her seat in the church of the Capucines, as

others had their *petite maison.* Age increased this serious or becoming inclination.

At the close of a Jubilee, which she observed with too much exertion in the summer of 1776, she was struck down by paralysis, and her daughter, profiting by her condition, shut the door to the philosophers, whose influence on her mother she dreaded. D'Alembert, Marmontel, Morellet, were harshly excluded. Imagine the clamour! Turgot wrote to Condorcet: "I pity that poor Mme. Geoffrin for undergoing such slavery, and for having her last moments poisoned by that villainous daughter." Mme. Geoffrin was no longer mistress of her actions; even after she came to herself, she felt that she had to choose between her daughter and her friends; the ties of blood carried the day: "My daughter," she said, smiling, "is like Godefroi de Bouillon; she wants to defend my tomb against the Infidels." She frequently sent to those Infidels her regards and her regrets; she also sent them gifts. Her mind grew feeble, but its character remained the same, and she roused up, now and then, to utter sayings that showed she was still herself. They were talking, one evening, round her bed of the means that Governments might employ to make their peoples happy; each person present suggested fine things: "Add," she said, "the care of *procuring pleasures for them;* a thing that is never enough thought of."

She died in the parish of Saint-Roch on the 6th

of October, 1777. The name of Mme. Geoffrin, and her form of influence, recall to us, naturally, another interesting name, which it is now too late to weigh with hers in this essay. The Mme. Geoffrin of our time, Mme. Récamier, had, in excess of the other, youth, beauty, poesy, the graces, a star on her brow, and, let us add, a goodness, a kindness that was not more skilful but more angelic. That which made Mme. Geoffrin superior in her government of a *salon* that was far otherwise extended and important, was a firmer, and, in some sort more domestic judgment, which made less efforts and advances, fewer sacrifices to the tastes of others—in short, it was the unique good sense of which Walpole has given us so clear an idea, and a mind not only delicate and refined but just and penetrating.

The Abbé Barthélemy.

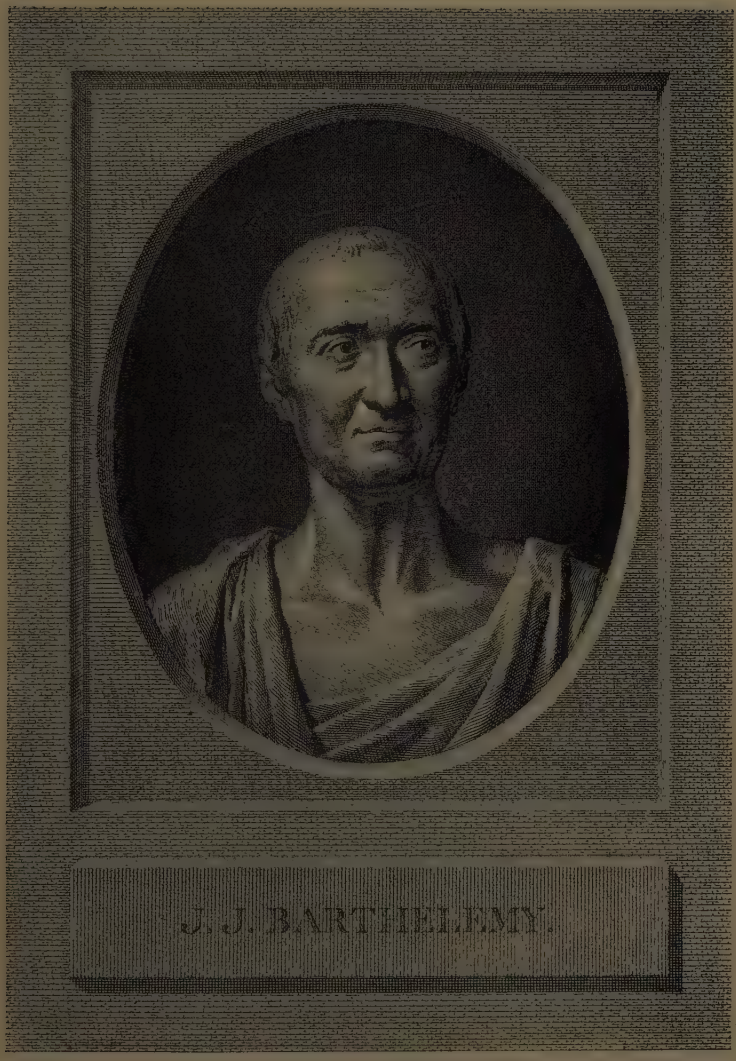
The Abbé Barthélemy.

I SPEAK to-day of the author of *Le Voyage du Jeune Anacharsis*, the Abbé Barthélemy. That work, which made his reputation and which appeared in 1788, seems to have been laid aside for some time and judged with a severity that ought not to run into injustice. It had, when it appeared, brilliant success, which was concurrent with the first events of the Revolution, and lasted as long as our fathers lived. They were grateful to the Abbé Barthélemy for what he had taught them, in a few days' reading, of that Greek world and that ancient society then talked of constantly, but into which very few had actually penetrated. The Abbé Barthélemy was to them, in this respect, a teacher such as Rollin had formerly been, but one more fitted to the new era; a teacher, brilliant and agreeable, polished and fluent, enlightened, pleasing, and very animated; skilful in concealing the depth and accuracy of his knowledge beneath a grace that was almost worldly.

He himself, as a man, has a character distinct and modestly original in its delicate shading, among all the celebrated writers of the eighteenth century. He deserves to be known and studied in his private life.

Literary criticism, which is justly proud and happy to rise to the occasion when it meets a lofty subject, takes pleasure, nevertheless, from its own nature, in those medium subjects (not for that reason mediocre) which allow the social moral to penetrate them.

When old, having reached the end of an existence until then favoured and most equably gentle and peaceful, the Abbé Barthélemy suddenly found himself deprived by the Revolution of fortune, ease of life, and liberty; in those moments of deprivation and retirement, he formed the idea of writing his Memoirs; these remained unfinished, but so far as they go, they are the source from which we learn to know him best. His family lived at the South, in the pretty little town of Aubagne, between Marseilles and Toulon ; he himself was born at Cassis, during a visit his mother made there in January, 1716. He has given us a sunny idea of his childhood in the bosom of a united and tender family. He had a brother and two sisters; having lost his mother early, he found in his father an affection that was truly maternal. He studied at the College of the Oratorians at Marseilles; and if we had to select a pupil who expressed, in its best aspect, the form of education received at the Oratory, liberal, ornate, varied, sufficiently philosophical and morally decent, no better example could be chosen than Barthélemy. He had, even in college, brilliant successes, and showed tastes already academic; and he possessed, as it were from birth, a very marked literary senti-



JEAN JACQUES BARTHÉLEMY.

After the bust by Houdon.

ment. Apropos of one of the public exercises that took place in the great hall of the college, the audience being in part composed of the prettiest women of the town, he records that when he saw M. de la Visclède, secretary of the Marseilles Academy, enter, "I could see no one but him; my heart palpitated as I looked at him."

Such was Barthélemy at fifteen years of age; an equable soul, affectionate and refined; with a mind eager, inquisitive, quick; hungry for knowledge, putting nothing above the beautiful and noble studies that can be cultivated peacefully in the shade of Academies and Museums. We could almost think that something of the penetration and gentleness of the ancient Greeks, those first colonisers and civilisers of the Phocian country, had passed into him, and that he had tasted their honey too long ever to be weaned from it. "I destined myself," he says, "for the ecclesiastical profession"; for him the Church meant what it has been at so many epochs, a haven of peace and study, a shelter for the learned and innocent researches from which a scholarly and cultivated mind cannot bear to be distracted. The Bishop of Marseilles, who had been so admirable during the plague, the virtuous Belzunce, did not like the theological and semi-jansenist doctrines of the Oratorians; and it was through him that Barthélemy pursued his philosophical and theological studies with the Jesuits. But though he passed that way, he was never acclimated to it, and whenever he spoke of the Jesuits it was always with a

slight touch of ridicule and aversion, naturally felt by the former pupil of the Oratorians and by the friend of the Duc de Choiseul.

The account that Barthélemy gives of the early years of his youth, passed in Provence at his various studies, learning Hebrew, Arabic, the history of medals, mathematics, and astronomy, is lively and piquant; he endeavoured to make it so by means of anecdotes well related. The study of mathematics and of astronomy in which he immersed himself for quite a long time, seemed to him afterwards one of the mistakes and dissipations of his youth. Without ambition, without strong passion, mingling liberal studies that were often intense, with the amusements of society, with readings among friends and little concerts, neglected and forgotten by his bishop, he lived at Aubagne in the bosom of his family, making, from time to time, little journeys to Marseilles or to Aix, which kept him in communication with the learned men of that region. But by this time, he was almost twenty-nine years of age; his brother's family was increasing, and the hour came when he was compelled to make a career for himself, and he started for Paris in June, 1744.

Among the letters of recommendation which he took with him was one to M. de Boze, one of the most influential of the Academicians, and the keeper of the Cabinet of Medals. The young abbé, invited to his dinners, given on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, became acquainted there with the learned men of the day, the

men of Letters in the Academy of Inscriptions, and with several persons of the great world who piqued themselves on their erudition and knowledge of art; he felt at first in their presence something of the respect and emotion that he had felt fifteen years earlier on seeing M. de la Visclède.

"This profound respect for men of Letters," he says, "I felt to such an extent in my youth that I ever retained the names of those who sent enigmas to the *Mercure*. The result to me was quite an injury; I admired but I did not judge. For a very long time I never read a book without acknowledging inwardly that I was incapable of making as good a one. In my last years I have been bolder in regard to works relating to research and to antiquity; I had then, by long labours, acquired rights to my own confidence."

Even supposing that the abbé, wishing to make his narrative lively, exaggerates a little his veneration and his trepidation, we at least see plainly the direction in which lay his vocation and the literary religion that was, as it were, infused into him. He grew bolder rapidly; he made himself known and liked by men who were more or less distinguished; and the more intelligence they had themselves the better he pleased them. Nature had done much for him; his manner of speaking was lively, easy, insinuating; intercourse with him was safe and charming. A contemporary, seeing him at the height of his fame, and having before his eyes the bust that Houdon made of him, describes him as follows:

"He had a very tall and well-proportioned figure. It seemed as if Nature wanted to match his form and his features to his morals and

his occupations. His face had an antique character and his bust could be rightly placed between those of Plato and Aristotle. It is the work of an able hand that knew how to put into his countenance that mixture of gentleness, simplicity, kindliness, and grandeur which render visible, so to speak, the soul of this rare man."

Take out the word *grandeur,* and the names of Plato and Aristotle, which are out of place, and it remains true that the Abbé Barthélemy had a very fine head, was a little too thin, but had all the external advantages that attract and charm, with manners that made the young scholar the most easy and natural of men of the world: "The Abbé Barthélemy," wrote Gibbon, "is very agreeable and has nothing of the antiquary about him but his erudition"; and all those who knew him said the same.

Before he became celebrated as a writer by his *Voyage du Jeune Anacharsis* (which he did not publish till he was seventy-two years of age), Barthélemy was long only an antiquary, and it was in that capacity that he gained his first renown. Arriving in Paris, and welcomed, as I have said, by M. de Boze, who made him his assistant in the Cabinet of Medals, and caused him to become a member of the Academy of Inscriptions, he was forced to train himself, under a most painstaking master, to extreme accuracy and to wearisome application. But nothing ever discourages that which comes in the line of a passion, and Barthélemy had a true passion for medals, something of that sacred fire which applies itself to many different objects, and

is well known to all those who have become possessed by the taste for collections.

Having succeeded M. de Boze when the latter died, he had no thought more dear than to enrich the King's Cabinet, thus intrusted to him, with new and rare treasures, and he was joyful when, in 1755, the Duc de Choiseul (then Comte de Stainville), appointed ambassador to Rome, offered to take him to Italy, lodge him at the embassy in Rome, and to facilitate his journey in every way. This was the beginning of a lasting tie that became closer year by year, and was broken only by death. The names of the Duc and Duchesse de Choiseul and that of the Abbé Barthélemy have become inseparable. There were grandeur and magnificence in the benefactions of M. de Choiseul, combined with a rare fund of delicacy; he won the hearts of all those he obliged. The Abbé Barthélemy had attraction, charm, constant amenity, a true and attaching sensibility. "My fate" he said, "is to have warm friends; it is a happiness of which I feel the full extent."

The first impression that he received on arriving in Rome and seeing the vast wealth of antiquities there accumulated was amazement, and something like discouragement:

"We can never hope," he cries, "to form such collections; we live in a land of iron for antiquaries. It is in Italy that researches should be made; never shall we conquer the Romans but in Rome. I blush a hundred times a day at the infinitely petty things that are in our infinitely petty Cabinet of antiques; I blush that I showed it to strangers;

what must they have thought of the interest I took in those bronzes seven or eight inches high, in those two or three mutilated heads of which I wanted them to admire the grandeur and the rarity! Why did no one warn me?"

Yet he recovered, little by little, from this electrical shock; he found his bearings; he selected and discerned among the objects of his research: "In the beginning," he says, "I saw Rome through a petrified fog; to-day I see it through a cloud that lets some flashes of light through it." It was in devoting himself particularly to his principal object, medals, that he succeeded, little by little, in accumulating treasures. He delights in relating the stratagems, the diplomatic wiles, the manœuvres that he has to employ. More than one antiquary is pitiless, and will not part with his possessions. Barthélemy is then obliged to resort to the plots of Ulysses:

For example, there is in Verona an antiquary named Muselli, who has the medal of a certain almost unknown little king which Barthélemy covets for his Cabinet, and which the possessor will not give up. But this Muselli like most of the Italian *savants,* has a great desire to be connected in some way with the Academy of Inscriptions in Paris, and Barthélemy begs M. de Caylus to negotiate with the Academy in favour of the said Muselli so far as to make him their correspondent; arranging, however, that to him, Barthélemy, the letters are to be sent: "I shall then," he says, "go to Verona; if he gives me the medal, I will

give him hopes; if he refuses it, I will make him fear my opposition to his desire; all this very politely. It is a misfortune for me that he knows the value of his treasure; you cannot snatch anything from Italians if they once know the value of what they possess." All this is said merrily, and in the tone of a man of the world which never fails to accompany the learned man in Barthélemy and gently to put aside the pedant.

At last, his harvest is garnered, his prize is won; he feels that his journey has not been mere loss; that was his fear at the beginning; a hundred times did he regret having occasioned a useless expense: "That thought," he says artlessly, "poisoned moments which I might have spent with more pleasure. But here I am now more tranquil, thanks to a dozen or two of little bits of bronze. It is certainly very senseless to have set one's happiness on the increasing of a treasure in which almost no one deigns to take an interest." It remains evident, after reading his letters from Italy, that, in spite of some success, he feels a little lost in that vast field; his journey has humbled more than it has delighted him, by revealing to his mind the full extent of much that he must either ignore or touch superficially. He feels the need of concentrating himself on his return; of shutting himself up while vigour remains, and not coming out of his retirement till he can bring with him some great work.

During this journey in Italy, I fancy I see two instincts struggling together in the breast of the Abbé

Barthélemy: one is the pure instinct of the antiquary, of the lover of old fragments, the zealous collector of rare medals, which tells him to exhaust the material he finds there and remain; and the other is the instinct of the writer, the man of modern art and of style, who, at the sight of these scattered treasures, these monuments of a great past, these relics of a vast ruin superseded by a brilliant Renaissance, feels the necessity of gathering himself together, of returning to his industrious hive and there composing a work that shall be his, his only. It was, in fact, from this sojourn in Italy that we must date the idea of the *Jeune Anacharsis*.

Barthélemy first thought of making a Frenchman travel in Italy about the time of Leo X, and of painting, by this means, the rich and full Renaissance; but, on reflection, he decided that he was less qualified for that subject, which would draw him from his favourite domain and throw him into a world of art, of modern poesy and painting, into a whole order of subjects with which he was only moderately familiar. He therefore transported his idea to Greece, inventing the visit of a Scythian to that country in the days of Philip of Macedon. This was the germ of his work, which took him thirty years to prepare and then to write.

On his return from this journey to Italy his life settled down into a single course; he became inseparable from the Choiseuls and could no longer part his fortunes from theirs. In any picture made of the society and the salons of the eighteenth century he must be pre-

sented as the most accomplished type of the erudite, social abbé, having all the advantages that the position implies, and paying for them by his kind offices and accomplishments.

In every rich household in the eighteenth century there was always "the abbé," an accessory and yet indispensable personage, convenient for the master and mistress of the house, answering the questions of the children and their mothers, keeping an eye on the tutor, well-informed, active, domestic, assiduous, amusing, a necessary piece of furniture in the country. I do not know who it was that wagered he could go from door to door through the Faubourg Saint-Germain asking each porter: "Has the abbé come in?" "Will the abbé dine at home to-day?" and that to these questions the porter would answer as if he knew of course who was meant. The Abbé Barthélemy, by his own merit, and by the nature of the sentiments that bound him to the Choiseuls, was far above this class of abbé; or rather he personifies it to our eyes by a superior and almost ideal example.

On the return from Italy, M. de Choiseul put his young wife in charge of the abbé to accompany her and bring her to Paris. This young woman, of whom all descriptions agree, was, from her tenderest years, a dainty perfection of good sense, prudence, grace, and prettiness.

"Mme. de Stainville," the abbé says of her, "though scarcely eighteen years of age, enjoyed the deep veneration that is usually accorded

only to a long exercise of the virtues: all in her inspired interest, her age, her face, the delicacy of her health, the vivacity that animated her words and actions, the desire to please which it was so easy for her to satisfy (the success of which she carried to a husband the worthy object of her tenderness and worship), the extreme sensibility that made her happy or unhappy through the happiness or troubles of others, and lastly, her purity of soul that never allowed her to suspect evil. At the same time, persons were surprised to see so much enlightenment with such simplicity. She reflected at an age when others scarcely begin to think."

The Abbé Barthélemy has on many occasions portrayed Mme. de Choiseul; he has put her with her husband into his *Jeune Anacharsis* under the names of Phédime and Arsame: "Phédime discerns at a glance the different bearings of a subject; with a single sentence she can express them. Sometimes she seems to remember what she has never learned."

He was very sensitive to friendship, and very worthy of it. He had many sweet and charming thoughts upon it. In a little *Traité de Morale,* written for the use of a nephew of M. de Malesherbes at the request of the mother, he shows how amenity was the natural bent of his character, and humanity the foundation of his soul. He knows very well how to distinguish between *complaisance* and friendship. Wishing to show that among the different sorts of spirit that of display and effusiveness is the most opposed to friendship, he says: "Friendship would get on better with that refined and delicate spirit which seems only to express itself to give pleasure, and leaves more to be perceived than is expressed. But observe that it pleases only in taking

the tone of true feeling, and it is necessary always to make plain that its seductive graces are not the fruit of worldly customs or of the hypocrisy of the heart." He desires friendship to be wholly sincere, wholly virtuous, and founded on the love of honour: "We need," he said, "in friendship, not a passing or imaginative fervour, but a steady and judicious warmth. When that warmth has had time to insinuate itself into hearts, when proofs have only rendered it more effectual, then the choice is made, then we begin to live in another *ourself.*" He speaks with feeling and with force. Friendship, and the continual solicitudes it brings with it, which embarrass some souls, are delightful to him. The details into which it must enter daily never weary him; far from causing him *ennui,* they seem to him a source of pleasure:

"Let us consecrate to friendship," he says, "all the moments of which other duties allow us to dispose; delicious moments that come so slowly, and go so fast; in which all that is said is sincere, all that is promised is durable; moments when hearts, unconstrained and bared, know how to give importance to the smallest things, and confide to one another without reluctance secrets that draw their ties the closer; moments, in short, when silence itself proves that souls can be happy in the silent presence of each other; for this silence brings neither distaste nor *ennui.* We say nothing, but—we are together."

He was one of those moderate and sensible souls who, amid slow and patient study and a pronounced taste for social enjoyments and familiar pleasantry, have within them a vein of tenderness, and who, in their hours of revery, feed themselves on passages from Euripides, Racine, or Saint-Augustine.

And why should he not have given himself wholly to the Choiseuls, who forestalled his slightest desires with so much grace and beneficence? During his last days in Rome he saw and desired to possess a dozen little figurines in terra-cotta, which had recently been discovered in a marble tomb; but the price demanded was excessive. He related this by chance to a friend in Mme. de Choiseul's presence; and the next day he found the twelve little figurines on his table with no intimation whence they came. Such deeds on the part of a gracious fairy were perpetual. On his return to Paris, he fitted up for himself a lodging and a study. Mme. de Choiseul, aided this time by Mme. de Grammont as her accomplice, obtained the key during his absence, and the philosophical study, decorated, by the touch of a wand, with all sorts of pretty furniture and even bits of embroidery by their own hands, was metamorphosed, in an hour, into a charming bower. This graceful deed was for the moment the talk of all Paris (November, 1762).

In these years Barthélemy justified the attentions he received by the manner in which he treated certain points of erudition before the public at the solemn sessions of his Academy. In April, 1763, at the public session after Easter, he read a dissertation on the Coptic language:

"We knew what it was to be beforehand," says Gibbon, "and every one blamed the choice of such a knotty subject, which seemed only suitable for private meetings. But we saw with pleasure mingled

with surprise how interesting our abbé made it to the women and persons of society who heard it, by the graces of his style, the acuteness of his criticism, and his correct and luminous principles."

"The women themselves," we find it stated in the Memoirs of Bachaumont, "were delighted with that lecture." Here we come upon the class of talent, and also upon what was to prove the general defect of the Abbé Barthélemy in his *Anacharsis,* namely, rather too much condiment in his erudition, and an elegant weakening of antiquity with worldly graces.

He was too highly favoured in these years not to rouse envy. During the ministry of the Duc de Choiseul, pensions, benefices, sinecures were poured upon him continually, to the point of giving him an annual revenue of nearly 40,000 *livres.* When he was named secretary-general of the Swiss Guard, a place which alone brought him 20,000 *livres,* those present at a Carnival ball a few days later beheld a tall, thin, ungainly man, representing a caricature of him masked, and wearing a costume partly of the Swiss Guard, but with breeches and a black cloak. A scene was acted between the mask and a stranger: "Who are you, noble mask?" asked the latter; "what profession do you belong to, abbé or guardsman?" "To one or the other, whichever you please," replied the mask, "provided it gives me 30,000 *livres* per year." The Duc de Choiseul was very angry and wanted to discover the actor. The abbé recovered the good opinion of the public by his moderation, and by resigning a small

pension which he received from the *Mercure.* This slight sacrifice, made at the right moment and without effort, pacified the Encyclopædists, with whom Barthélemy was not always on good terms because he did not belong to them.

After the fall of the Duc de Choiseul, when the office of colonel-general of the Swiss Guard was taken from him, Barthélemy sent in his resignation as secretary-general; and he persisted in it in spite of the efforts made to get him to withdraw it. They finally gave him, without his requesting it, a pension of 10,000 *livres* on the office he resigned. He was thus enabled to live with the noble exiles at Chanteloup, be faithful, as he should be, to friendship, and yet have a handsome revenue, which he disposed of generously and without ostentation.

If the letters, or rather the gazettes, which the Abbé Barthélemy wrote to Mme. Du Deffand from Chanteloup had been preserved, letters which gave an account of their doings from day to day, we should have true memoirs of the private life of the great world in the eighteenth century. We can get some idea of the correspondence from a little mock-heroic poem by Barthélemy, entitled *La Chanteloupée,* which is otherwise very frivolous. We find in the Correspondence of Horace Walpole a remark about the Abbé Barthélemy and a word of praise that needs some explanation. One of Walpole's friends, General Conway, being in France and, in spite of his expressed

desire, not succeeding in making the acquaintance of the Duc and Duchesse de Choiseul who were little inclined to it, Walpole writes to him:

"Though the Choiseuls hold themselves aloof from you, I hope that their Abbé Barthélemy is not subjected to the same quarantine. Besides great knowledge he has infinite wit and *polissonnerie*, and he is one of the best sort of men that there is in the world."

The word *polissonnerie* is written in French and underlined. Walpole evidently did not fully understand what the word signifies; it is probable that he meant to speak of the gay and lively playfulness that the abbé showed in a drawing-room. At supper with Mme. Du Deffand, or in writing to her of the doings at Chanteloup, this abbé of good society had a slight touch of Gresset about him.

The actual facts of the Abbé Barthélemy's merits as an antiquary, and before the publication of his *Anacharsis*, escape my search; what can be said in general is, that he rendered true service to the knowledge of medals [and the coins of antiquity]; that he contributed to raise them from the condition of mere curiosities, and to make them one of the regular and consecutive supports of history. In sixty years of practice, more than four hundred thousand medals passed through his hands. Bringing to this study, as to all those he undertook, a philosophical mind, he nevertheless preserved himself from what was called the philosophy of the century; and, as much, perhaps, from a sense of

propriety as from reflection, he at all times considered the attacks on religion, in which the brilliant men and the principal writers around him indulged, as fatal and ruinous.

After the death of the Duc de Choiseul in 1785, he lived in Paris, dividing his time between his Cabinet of Medals, his Academy and a few salons, that of Mme. de Choiseul being his centre. He carefully avoided all quarrels and disturbances; we find him advising Walpole, in a certain case, to give no pretext for war to Voltaire. He, himself, has the honour, I believe, of not being once mentioned in the Works of that monarch and literary despot of the eighteenth century. When, at the age of seventy, his friends advised him no longer to put off the publication of his *Jeune Anacharsis,* the work of his whole life, he hesitated long; and when he finally decided to let it appear, in 1788, that is to say on the eve of the States-General, his hope was that the attention of the public, being occupied elsewhere, would turn slowly and only little by little to the book, and therefore that it would have neither a success nor a failure: "I wished," he says, "that it might slide silently into the world."

In what I have thus far said, I have sought to present the Abbé Barthélemy in his surroundings and general mode of life; and to show the mild and tempered distinction of his nature; by so doing it becomes easier to speak of his work.

He wanted for his *Jeune Anacharsis,* as I have said,

a gentle, almost silent success, something like the manner in which it had been composed; and it obtained, from the very day it was published, a dazzling success. Yet, the States-General were just convoked and the year 1789 was opening in the midst of boundless expectation. Sièyes had published his pamphlet, "What is the Tiers-État?" Political discussion was becoming inflamed on all sides; but, amid the soughing of that impetuous, rising wind which was not yet a hurricane, the French Academy was receiving the Chevalier de Boufflers; the Abbé Delille recited in public sessions with applause, portions of a poem on Imagination, and the young Anacharsis entered the port of Athens with all sail set. It was the last great literary success of the eighteenth century, at the moment when the whole of French society was issuing from its happy lake, its peaceful Mediterranean, through unknown straits, whence the Genius of the new Era was to launch it with a powerful hand upon the ocean.

With his elegant and polished young Greek, who to-day seems to us so cold, the Abbé Barthélemy obtained a success like that of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. Men of the world, the *élite,* and also the people of Letters, and women, were all seized, in an instant, with enthusiasm. Mme. de Krüdner, who at that date was still only an ambassadress and a pretty woman, copied and learned by heart long passages of *Anacharsis;* Mme. de Staël, who had just written her *Lettres sur Jean-Jacques Rousseau* and who was dawning into

celebrity, addressed to the abbé at a supper couplets that sounded the names of Sappho and Homer. I find a quantity of verses addressed by amateurs to the learned abbé, among them some to the air of *Prends, ma Phillis.* In short, the success, save for a few isolated protestations, was sudden and universal. Frenchmen were grateful to an author who had continually thought of them while painting Athenians, and they applauded enthusiastically the gratifying resemblance.

The defects and the good qualities of the book are fully explained by the manner in which it was composed, and by the style of mind of the writer. At the time when he conceived the idea of his work Barthélemy had just read the ancient authors; he then reread them, pen in hand, "noting down on cards all the points that threw light on the nature of the governments, the habits and morals, and laws of the people, the opinions of philosophers." It was these precise and careful notes that he set himself to rearrange and unite by an ingenious plot and a pleasing narrative. "Antiquity," he thought, "is only a study of various accounts. The more we see of monuments, the more texts we have at hand, the better we are able to explain them one by the other." Here we see his method, which was that of collection and mosaic.

Having chosen his young Scythian traveller, to make him talk and judge of Greece in the days of Epaminondas and Philip of Macedon, he takes much trouble to introduce questions that the sight of Greece, at that

time, would not have roused; but he does it to elude and adroitly set aside certain other questions, and to produce a sort of rigid appearance of truth, for which, to-day, we do not thank him. Nevertheless, those who in their youth took pleasure (and I am one of them) in reading *Anacharsis,* have, from duty and gratitude, certain favourable reasons to present.

In Barthélemy's work there is a quality which we value too little in our day—namely, composition, connection, unity. The rather lively and elegant Introduction which epitomises the history of the earlier ages of Greece, makes the frontal of the abbé's monument. The *Voyage*—the Journey, properly so-called—begins joyfully and with emotion, by a visit to Epaminondas, the most perfect of ancient heroes; it ends, in the last chapter, with a portrait of the young Alexander: the whole narrative is enclosed between that first visit in Thebes, where the subject of Greece appears in all its glory, and the battle of Cheronæa, at which perished the liberties of Greece. Within these confines we have many instructive digressions, returns into ancient history; conversations in libraries; erudite but not perplexing dissertations; meetings with celebrated men, who are painted with a good deal of truth and character; chapters that are quite charming in their tempered style, such as the visit made to Xenophon at Scillus. In a word, though the current in *Anacharsis* is never rapid, it suffices to carry along a reader who is not too impatient, and who will pardon a lack of

vigour and originality for the sake of elegance and sweetness combined with accuracy.

Barthélemy has nothing of Montesquieu in his view of Greece. "Every author must follow his own plan," he said; "it did not enter into mine to send a traveller into Greece to take them my thoughts, but to bring back theirs to me as much as possible." It is a question, however, whether the thoughts of the Greeks, expressed by them and translated to us without previous explanation, are sufficiently suited to our use. We could wish that instead of minutely describing the Constitutions and the government of Athens, Barthélemy had made us feel more vividly the marked differences between them and modern society—slavery, on which they were founded, oppression of conquered races, civic rights reserved exclusively to a small number of the inhabitants, in the very place where, as we are told, the multitude ruled.

Barthélemy, by introducing a personage of the past, and making him constantly speak, cut himself off from the resource of modern and really statesmanlike considerations; but, had he spoken in his own name, he would also have ignored them; they did not enter into the nature of his mind. He kept to mundane and superficial analogies, and, if I may say so, to the Parisian resemblances which the names of Aspasia or Alcibiades suggested; he never cut to the depths in his comparisons. We find in Grimm's *Correspondance* a few pages written after reading *Anacharsis,* which

treat of the government of Athens; that short chapter, on the eve of the French Revolution, says more about that government than all the notes so minutely dovetailed together by Barthélemy. After stating the principal features of the government of Athens and the spirit of the Athenian people, after pointing out the influence, often sovereign, of their greatest men, Themistocles, Pericles, etc., Grimm (or the writer of the chapter, whoever he was) boldly drew this conclusion:

"It is therefore permissible to say that the most democratic democracy that ever has been, perhaps, in the world, had no more certain means of sustaining itself than to cease at times to be so; and that each time it was least democratic in fact it enjoyed a more brilliant fortune and one more truly to be envied."

Barthélemy has none of the comprehensive views of a statesman and a philosopher; nor has he those of a painter. His style, as I have said, has gentleness, and in places emotion and sensibility. I could quote many passages carefully worked up and graceful in effect; such, for instance, as the famous description of the spring-time at Delos: "In the happy climate where I dwell, spring is like the dawn of a beautiful day." But even there, we feel it is a theme, treated and caressed deliberately by a skilful, polished pen, rather than a picture grasped by the imagination or vividly seized from nature. It is the work of a descriptive Isocrates, and nothing more.

Chateaubriand, in his first, confused work, his *Essai sur les Révolutions,* started, in a way, from the *Voyage du Jeune Anacharsis* to make continual comparisons of antiquity with the modern world; but, after the first steps in the tracks of his predecessor, how he makes us feel that he penetrates far beyond him! His brilliant and energetic talent begins at once, and at all hazards, to give sword-thrusts through his subject, and from that sword the lightnings dart. It would seem that all new talent, new genius, must enter thus into subjects sword in hand, like Renaud into the enchanted forest; and that it needs to strike boldly until it has broken the charm: the conquest of the true and of the beautiful is at this cost.

After Chateaubriand had visited Greece she had a painter among us. I do not say that he painted simply, or in the manner that she herself, in her best days, would have preferred; I say only that with the means and system of colour which were his, he imparts to us vividly the *sensation* of Greece. He arrives in Athens; he mounts at once to the Acropolis; like a conqueror he chooses his camp; he establishes his sovereign point of view. Re-read that page of his *Itinéraire.* Thence he describes the hills, the monuments about him; he evokes, he re-creates in idea the ancient city, the theatre resounding with applause, the fleets issuing from the Piræus, the days of Salamis or of Delos. There is nothing more glorious under the sun nor more luminous than that picture. With

Barthélemy, with his young Anacharsis, who is supposed to arrive for the first time in Athens, we have nothing of the kind; we follow him through the streets, one by one, but without a *coup d'œil.* We feel that our guide is troubled, he finds his way with effort; at last we reach the steps that lead to the Acropolis; slowly we mount, and wearily. The general *coup d'œil* comes too late, and is feeble. All this tells us that Barthélemy has read, but not seen.

I do not wish, however, to lay too much stress on his defects; we feel them too much in our day; but in his day he had grace and a relative usefulness. The idea that men have formed of Greece, of that celebrated literature and country, has not always been the same in France; it has passed in the course of three centuries through many variations and vicissitudes. If, formerly, we made ourselves too effeminate and smiling an image of ancient Greece, are we not making too hard and savage a one to-day? In the sixteenth century, on the morrow of the Renaissance and in the intoxication that followed it, our French poets imitated the Greeks without sobriety, and without taste; they missed the grandeur through their very excess of imitation; they succeeded in rendering adequately only the lesser authors, the graceful odes, the Anacreonics, a few idylls fallen from the treasury of the "Anthology." Amyot by devoting himself to Longinus and Plutarch, propagated the literature of Greece far better by making its prose more liked.

In the seventeenth century Greece was not as well comprehended, nor as faithfully pictured as we imagine; Boileau, who did, strictly speaking, understand Longinus and Homer, was, nevertheless, far more Latin than he was Greek. Racine, imitating with genius and drawing his inspiration from his own heart, reproduced from the old tragic masterpieces nothing, if I may say so, but their pathetic and sentimental beauties, which he sought to assimilate with French elegances. Fénelon alone, without thinking of copying or of inventing, and solely from a natural simplicity of taste, found Greece beneath his pen and easily reproduced it.

In the eighteenth century Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, without ever having studied the Greek language, is the one who, on certain of his pages, has divined and best revealed the Greek genius. André Chénier attained to a perception of Greece, by race, by study, and by talent, and he takes us there, even into many a by-way. But before he was known, before his Elegies, confided to love or to friendship, could be repeated, after his death, by the lips of admirers, a growing taste, more or less intelligent, for the antique had sprung up at the close of the eighteenth century; and it was that taste, I might almost say that fashion, which *Le Voyage du Jeune Anacharsis* fostered and quickened. There was a moment when Greece, through the Abbé Barthélemy, was the rage in all Parisian salons and boudoirs. We find in the Memoirs of Mme. Vigée-Lebrun (the graceful painter) the story of a supper improvised after a

reading of *Anacharsis;* all the guests were draped in Greek costumes: even the cooking had a savour of antiquity. A cake was served made with the honey and raisins of Corinth; they drank the wine of Cyprus; they even tried, I think, a Lacedemonian broth. Le Brun-Pindare recited imitations of Anacreon.

Those imitations of Le Brun are more Greek than Barthélemy permitted himself to be. When he had a passage from Sappho or Sophocles to translate into verse for his *Voyage,* he had recourse to the muse of the Abbé Delille. The Greece of the Abbé Barthélemy corresponds well, in fact, with what appears to be the Roman country in the *Georgiques* of the other accomplished abbé. The literary usefulness of the two was of the same order and the same kind.

Chateaubriand, Paul-Louis Courier, and Fauriel have, since then, sufficiently corrected us of those ideas of Greece, redolent of the vicinity of Chanteloup, Ermenonville, and Moulin-Joli. For some time past another Greece has become the fashion, a Greece more complete, they assure us, more real, better based upon the original; often, however, too wanting in elegance. I applaud with all my heart such importations when they are faithful and conscientious; telling myself, at the same time, that they seem to proclaim, by this looking backward, a certain famine in the present, and that they must not be prolonged. The conclusions that I draw from this long series of attempts, which have, each in turn, gone to extremes, seldom reaching the exact

point, are that we cannot transplant one literature into another, nor the genius of one race and language into the genius of a different people; that to know Greece and the Greeks well, we should read them much and say but little—unless with those who read them also; and that to draw something from them into the current usage of our day, the surest way is to have talent and imagination in French.

If the Abbé Barthélemy had had more of that natural originality, of that living inspiration, we could pardon him certain infidelities in execution. In spite of all his care, in spite of his determination not to take one step without his erudite notes, his book must be considered, at least in certain parts, a modern and personal production. It was thus that, towards the end, during the sojourn at Delos, he could not refrain from giving himself free rein: the man is revealed; he puts into the mouth of Philocles his own ideas on happiness, on society, on friendship; he inserts, by extracts, his former little treatise on Morals that he wrote, many years earlier, for the nephew of M. de Malesherbes. We all know that he sang the praises of M. and Mme. de Choiseul in his work, under the names of Arsame and Phédime; and it is noticeable that he praises them at three different periods: in the first chapter, in the last chapter but one, and in the middle and very heart of his work; thus distributing, intentionally, these dear parts of his soul into the principal sections of his life-long work. When Barthélemy published the book,

M. de Choiseul was dead; Mme. de Choiseul still lived and was destined to survive the friend who lauded her so delicately.

The *Voyage du Jeune Anacharsis* had been published some months and its success had mounted to the clouds; a place became vacant in the French Academy by the death of the grammarian Beauzée, and Barthélemy, chosen unanimously to succeed him, was received at the public session on Saint Louis's day, August, 1789. The Chevalier de Boufflers replied to him, and took the honours of the session by a brilliant analysis of the *Jeune Anacharsis,* whose author he compared to Orpheus. In Barthélemy's speech certain neologisms attracted notice. He said, in speaking of the States-General, and the hopes, already clouded, to which they had given birth: "France . . . sees her representatives ranged around the throne, whence are descending words of consolation *that have never before fallen from such a height.*" The singularity of that sentence, according to Grimm, was much applauded. Barthélemy inaugurated the parliamentary style. In another place he said, lauding the invention of printing, and sacrificing slightly to the enthusiastic ideas of the moment: "Eternal day has dawned, and its effulgence, becoming ever brighter, will penetrate successively all climes."

Barthélemy must have had, at the bottom of his heart, less ease and confidence in auguring good for the future. It was he who said, in a letter of Calli-

medon to Anacharsis, speaking of popular prejudices and superstitions: "My dear Anacharsis, when we say that an age is enlightened, that means that more ideas are found in certain towns than in others; and that in those the principal class of citizens is better educated than it once was." As for the multitude, "not excepting," he said, "that of Athens," he believed it almost incorrigible and little perfectible, adding with discouragement: "Never doubt it: men have two favourite passions that philosophy cannot destroy—that of error, and that of slavery." While thinking thus he was not misanthropic; nor was he inclined to blacken human nature. "In general," he said, "men have less wickedness than weakness and inconstancy."

The events of the Revolution came, blow after blow, to sadden his heart, and destroy the structure, hitherto so secure, of his fortune. Until then he had led the most well-arranged and comfortable of existences; he now saw it daily fall to pieces, bit by bit, and escape him. He had the right spirit to stifle his own complaints, reflecting on the oppression of all and the common calamity:

"I speak to you only of literature," he writes to M. de Choiseul-Gouffier in March, 1792, "because all other subjects are grievous and torturing. I turn my mind from them as much as possible. We are at a point where we cannot think of the past nor of the future, and scarcely of the present. I go to the Academies, and to very few houses, sometimes to solitary promenades; and when night comes I say to myself: 'There is another day gone by.'"

Soon the Academies, his true homes, failed him; they were abolished. Nothing remained to him, except his Cabinet of Medals. But such sanctuaries, in revolutionary days, are not inviolable or sacred. In all public establishments where a certain number of men are employed, there is always one, usually of inferior rank, who has piled up, during years of silence, heaps of gall and envy, and when the day of revolution comes, that man will rise against the others, who may not even have known him until then, and become their enemy and denouncer. This is what happened at the Bibliothèque du Roi. An employé, named Tobiezen-Dubi, denounced all his superiors, and his information was accepted. Barthèlemy was taken, September 2, 1793, to the prison of the Madelonnettes.

Mme. de Choiseul, as soon as she received the news, bestirred herself and took steps to influence the representative Courtois, who went to the Committee of Public Safety. There he pleaded earnestly for the inoffensive old man, whose literary success, applauded by all, was still so recent. He found an echo to his words on all sides, with one solitary opposing voice; that of an author, formerly much protected at Court, Laignelot, who had written the tragedy of *Agis* some years before the publication and success of *Anacharsis,* and who had since then nurtured a professional jealousy of it. Barthélemy left the prison after a confinement of only sixteen hours.

The Minister of the Interior, Paré, in an honourable

letter (written in the style of *Anacharsis*), hastened to inform the old man, that in order to atone for that momentary severity, he was appointed director-general of the Bibliothèque. Barthélemy was touched, but he declined the office; he was satisfied to remain among his medals: he even returned, at this close of his life, to his favourite study with that renewal of love for it which many an old man feels for the first occupations of his youth. But the springs of life were worn out in him. It was noticed that the desire to please, "which was perhaps his dominant passion," abandoned him gradually; an habitual gloom enveloped his soul; the Revolution seemed to him, and he so called it, a "revelation," which disconcerted all the moderately indulgent ideas he had hitherto formed of human nature. Friendship alone and the thought of Mme. de Choiseul still brightened him, and his last care, in his last days, was for her, desiring to spare her the emotion that the news of his condition would cause her.

Mme. de Choiseul, after the death of her husband in 1785, retired to a convent in the rue du Bac; chiefly to economise in order to pay his debts and thus protect his memory. After the suppression of the convents, and under the Directory, she lived in an entresol of the Périgord mansion in the rue de Lille, where she died in November, 1801, under the Consulate, surviving her friend six years.

The Abbé Barthélemy died in April, 1795, in his eightieth year. At one of the sessions of the Con-

vention that followed his death, Dusault, the former friend of Jean-Jacques and the translator of Juvenal, mounted the tribune and pronounced a Eulogy upon him, in which he recommended the nephews of the deceased to the care of the nation. "Barthélemy," he said, in the sentimental language of the day, through which a sincere affection made itself felt,

"Barthélemy was an excellent man in all respects. Those who knew him knew not which to admire most, his immortal *Anacharsis*, or the whole tenor of his life. A single remark of his discloses the sweetness of his philanthropic soul: 'Why is it not given to a mortal,' he exclaimed, 'to be able to bequeath happiness?'"

To the shocking maxim of loving our friends as though we might some day hate them, Barthélemy liked to substitute another, more human, more consoling, from one of his ancient authors: "Hate your enemies as though you were some day to love them."

Louis XV.

Louis XV.

LOUIS XV, though endowed with a noble presence, and many apparent graces, showed himself, from his earliest years, the weakest and most timid of beings. It has often been said—but never often enough, that his was the most vacant, the most contemptible, the most cowardly, of the hearts of kings. Nothing is better fitted to make known his moral nature than certain letters written by Mme. de Tencin to the Duc de Richelieu during the year 1743.

Informed by her brother, the cardinal, of all that went on at the King's Council, this clever and intriguing woman reports it to the Duc de Richelieu, then with the army in Holland. Only her own sentences, given verbatim, can fully expose the opinion she entertained of the king.

"Versailles, June 22, 1743—You ought, I think, to write to Mme. de Châteauroux, and tell her to try to drag the king out of the torpor he is in about public affairs. What my brother has been able to say to him on that subject is useless: it is, as he sent you word, like talking to a rock. I cannot conceive how a man can wish to be *nil* when he could be something. No one but you could conceive the point to which things have now come What passes in his kingdom seems not to concern him; nothing affects him; in the Council he

is absolutely indifferent; he assents to whatever is laid before him. Verily, it is enough to drive any one to desperation to have to do with such a man. Whatever the case may be, his apathetic nature leads him to the side on which there is least trouble, though it may be the worst side. . . . The news from Bavaria is bad. . . . They say the king avoids being told what takes place, and says it is better to know nothing than to hear disagreeable things. Fine *sang-froid* truly!"

Would the king go, or would he not go to the army? A whole system of machinery had to be prepared and set in motion to effect it:

"My brother," writes Mme. de Tencin, "is inclined to think it would be useful to put him at the head of his troops. Not, between ourselves, that he is fit to command a company of grenadiers; but his presence would do much; the people love their king from habit; they will be enchanted to see him take this step—to which he will have been incited. His troops will do their duty better; and the generals will not dare openly to neglect theirs any longer."

I might multiply these crushing quotations: "Nothing in this world resembles the king," she writes, summing him up in one sentence. Such was Louis XV, in his full force and virility, on the eve of what the people were about to call his heroism.

The young king, who was sickly for a long time in childhood, and whose life seemed to hang by a thread, was brought up with excessive precautions; all effort was spared him, more, even, than is usually spared a prince. Cardinal de Fleury directed his education wholly in the line of indolence and effeminacy. That old man of over eighty, partly from habit, partly from wiliness, kept his royal pupil perpetually in leading-strings; turning him aside from all that re-

sembled an idea or an enterprise, watchful to uproot in him the least volition or desire; thus he had accustomed him to nothing but the easiest things. Nature, moreover, had done nothing to help the young king to surmount this senile and effeminate education. There was no spark in him except that which early declared itself for things of sense. The young courtiers, the ambitious men who surrounded him, saw with vexation this tutelage of the cardinal, this insipid childhood, this schoolboy rôle prolong itself in a king who was over thirty years of age ; they saw that there was only one means of emancipating him, and that was to give him a mistress. He had had them for years, but always as a lad and under the good pleasure of the cardinal ; he needed one, they thought, who would be really mistress, and would make him his own master.

To this end they managed matters, and it may be said that Louis XV in this novel hunt had no more to do than the sluggard kings in the other kind of hunts, who shot the game when it was brought before them. They aided him, for his start in this direction, to choose successively three sisters, daughters of Mme. de Nesle, so much did habit and a species of routine rule him even in his inconstancy.

Cardinal de Fleury being dead, intrigues were carried on with renewed ardour; the question was, inasmuch as the king had no will of his own, to know what hand would seize the tiller. It was then that

Mme. de Tencin, anxious to advance her brother, the cardinal, to the head of the ministry, wrote to the Duc de Richelieu to urge Mme. de Châteauroux (the third of the Nesle sisters) to "drag the King from his torpor." The idea prevailed, and Mme. de Châteauroux did, for one moment, make Louis XV a phantom hero and the idol of the people. She had heart; she felt a generous inspiration and she imparted it. She tormented this king, who seemed to regret he was a king, by talking to him of State affairs, of his interests, of his fame. "You kill me," he kept saying. "So much the better, sire," she answered. "A king must be resuscitated." She did resuscitate him; for a short time she succeeded in making Louis XV conscious of honour and scarcely recognisable.

We are now not so far from Mme. de Pompadour as we seem. This was the king whom she watched (while still Mme. d'Étioles) when hunting in the forest of Sénart, and set herself to love. She dreamed of Henri IV and Gabrielle. Mme. de Châteauroux dying suddenly [poisoned, rumour said, by those who wished to keep her from the king], she told herself that it was she who should take her place. A plot was at once laid by her friends. The details are lacking, but what is certain is that, with that total want of initiative that characterised Louis XV, it was necessary to do for her what had been done for Mme. de Châteauroux and her sisters, namely, *arrange* the affair for him. In such cases, especially with princes, offi-

cious go-betweens are never lacking. Mme. de Tencin, after seeing her first instrument, Mme. de Châteauroux, broken, concurred in replacing her by Mme. d'Étioles. The Duc de Richelieu, on the contrary, was opposed to the latter, having another candidate in view, a great lady; for it seems that to be mistress of the king the great requisite then was that she should be a lady of quality; and the accession of Mme. de Pompadour, *née* Poisson, was a total revolution in the manners and morals of the Court. In this sense, especially, there was scandal, and the great shade of Louis XIV was invoked. M. de Maurepas, with the Richelieus and their class, revolted at the idea of a *bourgeoise*, a *grisette*, as they called her, usurping the power hitherto reserved for wantons of noble blood. Maurepas, satirical first and last, remained in opposition, and consoled himself by writing verses for twenty-five years. Richelieu, ever a courtier, made his peace, and was reconciled.

The year 1745, that of Fontenoy, was for Mme. d'Étioles one of triumph and also one of great metamorphoses. Her liaison with the king was "arranged"; she awaited only the moment of its public announcement. The king was with the army, writing her letters upon letters. Voltaire, who was staying with her at Étioles, lent himself to the pretty play of Henry IV and Gabrielle and rhymed madrigals upon madrigals. Bernis, faithful to the taste of the day, addressed her as "that virtuous beauty"; with

which title the young Pompadour made her entrance into Versailles as one "whose heart was taken captive by a faithful hero."

All this seems strange and almost ridiculous now; but if we study Mme. de Pompadour attentively we shall see that there is truth in this way of looking at the matter, and that it is representative of the real taste of the eighteenth century. Mme. de Pompadour was not precisely a *grisette,* as her enemies affected to say, and as Voltaire repeated on one of his malicious days: she was a *bourgeoise,* the flower of finance, witty, elegant, graced with many gifts and many talents, but with a manner of feeling that lacked the grandeur and coldness of aristocratic ambition. She loved the king for himself; as the handsomest man of his kingdom, as the one who seemed to her most lovable; she loved him sincerely, sentimentally, if not with deep passion. Her ideal, on arriving at Court, was to charm him, amuse him, by a thousand diversions derived from the arts or from the intellect; to make him happy and keep him constant by a varied round of enchantments and pleasures. A landscape by Watteau, games, comedies, pastorals in shady nooks, a continual embarkation for Cythera, such was her coveted framework. But once transplanted to the slippery ground of a Court, she could realise that ideal only very imperfectly. She, who was naturally obliging and kind, was forced to arm herself against enmities and treacheries, and to take the offensive to save herself from

being overthrown; and later, she was forced by necessity into politics and into making herself a minister of State.

She loved the arts and the things of the intellect as no mistress of a king had ever done before. Arriving at that position, eminent but little honourable (much less honourable than she thought it), she at first considered herself as destined to aid, summon around her, and encourage, suffering merit and men of talent of all kinds. Her sole glory lies there, her best title and her excuse. She did everything to bring forward Voltaire, and to make him agreeable to Louis XV, whom the petulant poet disgusted by the very vehemence and familiarity of his laudations. She thought she had found a genius in Crébillon and honoured him. She favoured Gresset, she protected Marmontel, she welcomed Duclos, she admired Montesquieu and showed her admiration openly. When the King of Prussia gave ostentatiously a very modest pension to d'Alembert, she advised Louis XV, when he sneered at the amount of the pension (1200 *livres*) compared with the "sublime genius" it professed to reward, to forbid the philosopher to accept it and to grant him an annuity that was double that sum. This Louis XV dared not do, for pious reasons, because of the "Encyclopædia." It was not her fault that no one can speak of the "age of Louis XV" as they do of that of Louis XIV. She would fain have made this king, so little affable, so little *giving*, a friend of the Arts, of

Letters, and liberal as a Valois. "What was François I like?" she asked the Comte de Saint-Germain, who claimed to have lived through several centuries; "there is a king I should have loved." But Louis XV could not bring himself to the idea of regarding men of Letters and intellect as of any importance, or of admitting them on any footing at all in his Court:

"It is not the fashion in France," said this monarch of routine, one day when they cited to him the example of Frederick the Great; "besides, as there are so many more *beaux-esprits* and great seigneurs here than in Prussia I should be forced to have a very large dinner-table to assemble them all." Then he counted on his fingers: "Maupertuis, Fontenelle, La Motte, Voltaire, Fréron, Piron, Destouches, Montesquieu, Cardinal de Polignac"—"Your Majesty forgets," some one said, "d'Alembert and Clairaut,"—"And Crébillon," he added, "and La Chaussée"—"And Crébillon *fils*," said another, "he is more amiable than his father; besides, there is the Abbé Prévost, and the Abbé d'Olivet." "Well!" said the king, "for twenty-five years *all that* might have been dining or supping with me!"

Ah! *all that* would indeed have been mightily out of place at Versailles; but Mme. de Pompadour would have liked none the less to see them there, and to have brought about some bond of opinion between the monarch and the men who were the honour of his reign.

In the *entresol* of her apartment at Versailles, lived Dr. Quesnay, her physician, the patron and founder of the sect of the Economists. He was a very original man; brusque, honest, sincere in the midst of a Court; grave, with "an air of mimicry," and ever finding ingenuous parables through which to speak the truth. While the king was above with Mme. Pompadour, Bernis, Choiseul, and the ministers and courtiers who governed with her, the Encyclopædists and the Economists, were below, with Quesnay, talking freely of all things, and settling the future. It would seem as if Mme. de Pompadour herself had a consciousness of the gathering storms above her head when she exclaimed in the famous words: *Après moi le Déluge!* It was that *entresol,* full of ideas and doctrines, which held the cataracts that, sooner or later, were to burst upon them from the skies. On certain days round Quesnay's dinner-table could be seen sitting together Diderot, d'Alembert, Duclos, Helvétius, Turgot, Buffon, *all that,* as Louis XV said: "and Mme. de Pompadour," Marmontel relates, "not being able to invite that group of philosophers to her salon, would come down herself to see them at table, and talk with them."

One day, when M. de Marigny, Mme. de Pompadour's brother, was in Quesnay's apartment, the talk fell on the Duc de Choiseul:

"'He is nothing but a coxcomb,' said the doctor, 'if he were a little better-looking he would be just made for a favourite of Henri III. The

Marquis de Mirabeau [father of the great Mirabeau] and M. de La Rivière were present. 'This country,' said Mirabeau, 'is in a bad way; there are no energetic sentiments, and no money to supply their place.' 'It cannot be regenerated,' said La Rivière, 'unless by a conquest like that of China, or by some great internal overthrow; but woe to those who live here then! the French populace strikes hard.' 'Those words,' says the good Mme. Hausset, Mme. de Pompadour's waiting-woman, who relates the scene in her Memoirs, 'made me tremble and I hastened to leave the room; so did M. de Marigny, without showing that he was affected by what was said.' "

Join these prophetic words to those which escaped Louis XV himself when talking of the opposition of the Parliament: "Things as they are will last my time." That was the end of the world to him.

Did Mme. de Pompadour contribute as much as it has been said she did to the ruin of the monarchy? She certainly did not hinder it. Yet the character of Louis XV being what it was, it may have been the best thing that could happen to such a king to fall into the hands of a woman "born sincere, who loved him for himself, who was just of mind, and upright in heart—qualities that are not to be met with every day." Such, at least, is Voltaire's opinion, judging Mme. de Pompadour after her death. In spite of everything, she was certainly the mistress who suited the reign; the only one that could have lessened the crying disparity between the least literary of kings and the most literary of epochs. As mistress and friend of the king, as protectress of the arts, her mind was wholly on the level of her rôle and her position; as a politician she failed, she did harm; but not more harm, perhaps, than any

other favourite might have done at that epoch when France was without a single real statesman.

Looking carefully at the condition of the country at the close of the ministry of Cardinal de Fleury, it is difficult to avoid believing that if the Duc de Choiseul and Mme. de Pompadour had not come to an understanding and given some consistency and some sequence to the policy of France, the Revolution, or rather the social dissolution, would have taken place thirty years earlier than it did, so nerveless were all the powers of the State. And at that time, the nation, the men of '89, who were being trained, by the sight of all this baseness, to a love of the public good, would not have been ready to gather up the fragments of the old inheritance while giving the signal for the new era.

Louis XV, contemptible as he was in character, was not without intelligence or good sense. Many clever sayings of his are quoted; piquant and sometimes shrewd repartees, such as the princes of the house of Bourbon are noted for. He seems to have had good judgment, if that term is not too exalted to signify the sort of immobility and sloth in which he liked to keep his mind; but what he wanted, above all, was to be governed. He was a Louis XIII transplanted into the eighteenth century with all the vices of his time; as feeble, as cowardly, and much less chaste than his ancestor; and who never found his Richelieu. He could not have found him except in a handsome woman; and such combinations—that of the genius of a Richelieu

in the body of a Pompadour are not, perhaps, in the order of things possible. Yet, at a certain moment, Mme. de Pompadour knew that her rôle as mistress was ended; she felt there was but one sure means of maintaining her influence,—that of being the necessary friend and minister, the one who could relieve the king of the trouble of willing in the affairs of State. She then became such or as nearly such as the circumstances required of her; she forced her nature, which was far more fitted for the government of little coteries and minor pleasures.

Here mythology ceases and history begins, an ignoble history! After she had made the king dismiss MM. d'Argenson and de Machault, she governed conjointly with M. de Bernis and M. de Choiseul. Then it was that the world saw the political system of Europe overturned, the ancient alliances of France set aside, and a whole series of great events lying at the mercy of the inclinations, the antipathies, the frail and egotistical good sense of a charming woman.

Then was seen a most singular spectacle: that of an heroic and cynical King of Prussia in a struggle with three women, three *sovereigns* rabid for his ruin, whom he characterised, all three of them, energetically—the Empress Elizabeth of Russia, the Empress Maria Theresa, and Mme. de Pompadour, dealing with them as a man who is accustomed neither to love the sex nor fear it. Louis XV said naïvely of that king, whose ally he had not known how to be, and of whom he

was so often the humiliated and defeated enemy: "He is a crazy man who will risk his all on the cast of a die, and who may win the game, though he is without religion, morals, or principles." It is amusing to see that Louis XV thought he himself had more morals and principles than Frederick; and he did have, in fact, rather more, inasmuch as he believed he had.

The state of public opinion in France at the beginning of this Seven Years' War, so lightly undertaken, was not what it became a year later. The new alliance with Austria, conceived in defiance of the old historical maxims, filled all minds and flattered all hopes. The Empress Maria Theresa, in her passionate and courageous struggle against the aggrandisement of Prussia, employed special coquetry in her endeavour to win France, not disdaining to make herself the "friend" of Mme de Pompadour; and the decision was formed at Versailles to "be for Austria" precisely as we declare for friends against all opponents in some society or coterie quarrel. Bernis, Mme. de Pompadour's right hand, was recalled from Venice and ordered to draw up and negotiate the treaty of alliance. In spite of his first objections as a man of sense, he did not long resist the general movement that carried away the whole community; he was dazzled himself, and finally believed that he was furthering the greatest political transaction since the days of Richelieu.

The history of the change that one year brought about in the minds of every one, more particularly in

his own, can best be understood from the letters of Bernis, then minister of Foreign Affairs, to the Comte de Stainville (afterwards Duc de Choiseul), ambassador to Rome. The war began by successes: the taking of Port-Mahon, the victory of Hastenbach, the early advantages of the Duc de Richelieu, seemed to promise an easy victory to the new diplomatic combination. Bernis kept all such hopes until the moment when the Duc de Richelieu concluded with the Duke of Cumberland the hasty convention of Kloster-Zeven, September 8, 1757. From that moment the chances of war turned and became unfavourable. Three months later, (December 13th) Bernis writes to Choiseul:

"One does not die of grief, inasmuch as I am not dead since September 8. The blunders committed since that date have been heaped up in such a way that one can hardly explain them except by supposing evil intentions. I have talked with the greatest force to *God and his Saints* (Louis XV). I produce a slight rising of the pulse, and then the lethargy returns; great sad eyes are turned upon me, and all is said."

He sees that there is neither king, nor generals, nor ministers, and the charge seems to him so just that he consents to be included in the category of those who do not exist:

"I seem to myself to be the minister of the Foreign Affairs of Limbo. Try and see, my dear count, whether you can do better than I in kindling the spark of life, which is being extinguished here. As for me, I have dealt all my great blows; henceforth I shall take the course of becoming paralysed like the rest in regard to feeling, without ceasing to do my duty as a good citizen and an honest man."

In France, at this date, there was no direction, no management, no control, either in the armies or in the Cabinet. Insubordination and want of discipline were everywhere; no one was either feared or obeyed. The rivalry and disunion of the Duc de Richelieu and the Prince de Soubise led to the disasters at the end of the campaign. In the midst of these reverses, which affected so deeply the military honour of France and the future of the monarchy, Louis XV remained totally apathetic:

"There is no other such instance of playing a vast game with as much indifference as he would show to a game of cards. . . . Sensitive, and, if I may dare to say it, sensible as I am, I am dying on the rack, and my martyrdom is useless to the State. . . . May it please God to send us a *will* of some kind, or some one who will have it for us! I would be his valet, with all my heart. . . ."

It is not possible, even after the lapse of a century, to read a certain letter from Bernis to Choiseul (March 31, 1758,) without blushing. Never was the decadence of the monarchy of Louis XV so bare to sight; we feel, from the very character of the evil, that the dissolution of everything was near at hand: "We must change our moral habits," he cries, "and that work which demands centuries in other lands could be done in a year in this land, if there were doers to do it." That remark is profoundly true, applying, I do not say to morals, but to the sentiments and to the spirit of our nation, which we have seen, more than once, completely reversed, in a moment of time, under the impulsion of a powerful mind. In Paris,

the exasperation of the public mind had reached a climax in that summer of 1758:

"I am threatened, in anonymous letters," writes Bernis, "to be torn in pieces by the populace, and though I do not fear such threats, it is certain that coming evils, which all can foresee, may easily realise them. *Our friend* [Mme. de Pompadour] "runs quite as much risk as any of us."

There were two distinct epochs in Mme. de Pompadour's career and influence: the first, the most brilliant and the most favoured, was on the morrow of the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, (1748): then she was completely in her rôle as a young, adored woman; happy in the peace, in the arts, in the pleasures of the mind, protecting and counselling all fortunate things. Then came the second epoch, very confused, but chiefly fatal and disastrous; this was the whole period of the Seven Years' War; the period of Damiens' attempt on the king's life, the defeat at Rosbach, and the victorious insults of Frederick the Great. These were hard years, that aged before she was old this frail and gracious woman, dragged into a struggle that was too strong for her. Yet my own impression, resulting to-day from a simple glance at this distance, is that things might have gone even worse, and that Mme. de Pompadour aided by M. de Choiseul, did, by means of the "Family Compact," redeem some of her own faults, and the humiliation of France and its monarchy.

It would seem that the nation itself felt this; and felt it, above all, after the brilliant favourite had fallen very low; for when she died at Versailles, April 15, 1764, the regret of the people of Paris, who would have stoned her a few years earlier, was universal. One of those who seems to have regretted her least was Louis XV; it is related of him that as he watched from a window the removal of the coffin from the Château of Versailles to Paris, he remarked (it being a stormy day): "The marquise will have bad weather for her journey." His ancestor, Louis XIII, said at the hour of the execution of his favourite, Cinq Mars: "Dear friend must be making a horrible grimace just now." Compared with such a speech, that of Louis XV seems quite touching in its feeling.

The death of Mme. de Pompadour was a severe loss to the arts, and they have consecrated her memory. If Voltaire, as a man of letters, could say of her to his friends, "She was one of us," artists had still stronger reason to say it. Mme. de Pompadour was herself a distinguished artist. Directly, and through her brother, M. de Marigny, whom she caused to be appointed Superintendent of Buildings, she exercised a most active and happy influence. At no epoch was art more living, more related to social life, which expressed itself in it, and modelled itself by it. Diderot, giving an account of the Salon of 1765, and speaking of an allegorical picture by Carl Van Loo,

which represented the Arts in despair supplicating Destiny for the recovery of the marquise, says:

"She protected them indeed; she loved Carl Van Loo, she was the benefactress of Cochin; the engraver Gai had his tools at her house. Too happy would the nation have been had she confined herself to amusing the sovereign with such relaxations, and in ordering from artists their pictures and statues." Then, after describing the painting, he concludes, rather harshly, it seems to me:

"Van Loo's Suppliants obtained nothing from Destiny, which proved more favourable to France than to the Arts. Mme. de Pompadour died at the moment when they thought her out of danger. Well! what remains of that woman who exhausted us in men and money, left us without honour or energy, and who overturned the whole political system of Europe? The Treaty of Versailles, which will last as long as it may; Bouchardon's *Amour*, that will be forever admired; a few of Gai's engravings, which will astonish antiquaries in years to come; a good little picture by Van Loo, which people will look at occasionally, and a handful of ashes!"

Some other things remained, and posterity, or at any rate the amateurs who to-day represent it, seem to ascribe to Mme. de Pompadour's influence, and to range under her name many more objects worthy of attention than Diderot enumerates. I shall rapidly indicate a few of them.

Mme. de Pompadour had a fine library, especially rich in dramatic works; a library chiefly composed of French books, that is, of books she read, most of them bound with her arms (three towers), on the

cover; some with broad lace-work ornamenting the flat surfaces [*avec de larges dentelles qui ornent les plats*]. These volumes are still sought for, and bibliophiles give her a choice place in their golden book, beside the most illustrious collectors whose names have come down to us. She carried her love of this art so far as to print with her own hands, at Versailles, a tragedy by Corneille, *Rodogune* (1760): of which only twenty copies were printed. These were mere caprices, some may say; but they prove the taste and the passion for letters in this woman who "would have loved François I."

In the Cabinet des Estampes is a collection entitled *Œuvre de Mme. de Pompadour;* which contains more than sixty of her engravings and etchings. They are for the most part allegorical designs, intended to celebrate some of the memorable events of the day; but there are others that come more within the idea we have of the charming artist: "Love cultivating a myrtle," "Love cultivating laurels." The Loves appear under many aspects; Military Genius itself is represented as Love meditating among flags and cannon. Not content with reproducing on copper with acids the engravings of Gai on stone, Mme. de Pompadour seems to have done some engraving herself on delicate stones—agate and cornelian. Her etchings, at any rate, were retouched with the graving-tool. Here, as in printing, she put her pretty hand to the actual work; she is of the trade; and just as the

bibliophiles inscribe her on their list, and the typographers on theirs, the engravers have a right to class in their ranks, with the title of co-worker, "Mme. de Pompadour, etcher."

The Manufactory of Sèvres owes much to her; she looked after it actively; she often took the king there; and he, for once, felt the importance of an art to which he owed magnificent dinner-services worthy to be offered as gifts to sovereigns. Under the fostering influence of Versailles, Sèvres soon had original marvels fit to compete with old Dresden and Japan. Nowhere does the style called "Pompadour" shine with more fancy and delicacy, or more in its true place, than in the porcelain of that date. This glory of hers, due to a fragile art, is more durable than many others.

While her brother, M. de Marigny, summoned Soufflot from Lyons to entrust him with the erection of Sainte-Geneviève (the Pantheon), she herself was deeply interested in the establishment of the École Militaire, to which she contributed her own money. Among the very few authentic letters that we have of hers is the following, addressed to a friend, the Comtesse de Lutzelbourg, January 3, 1751:

"I think you must be very pleased with the edict just issued by the king to ennoble the military. You will be still more so with one that is soon to appear for the establishment of five hundred gentlemen, whom the king is to have trained in the military art. This royal school will be built quite close to the Invalides. This establishment will be all the finer because His Majesty has been working over

it for a year, and the ministers have had no part in it, and, indeed, knew nothing of it until he had arranged it to his fancy. . . ."

If the king ever thought of it alone and without the suggestions of his ministers, there can be no doubt that to Mme. de Pompadour he owed the inspiration, for he was not a man to originate such ideas himself. That this was the fact appears in another, and later, letter from Mme. de Pompadour to Paris-Duverney, who was the one who first suggested the idea to her.

"No, indeed, my dear simpleton, I shall not allow to perish in port an establishment which ought to immortalise the king, render happy the nobles, and make known to posterity my attachment to the State and to the person of His Majesty. I have told Gabriel to-day to arrange for the necessary workmen to finish the work. My revenue for this year has not yet come in; but I shall employ it all in paying the journeymen every fortnight. I do not know whether I shall find any security for repayment, but I know very well that I shall risk one hundred thousand *livres* for the welfare of those poor lads."

Such in her prosperous days was this enchanting, ambitious, frail woman, who was also sincere, who remained kind in her prosperity, faithful (I like to think so) in her sin, serviceable where she could be, yet vindictive when driven to it; a woman who was truly of her sex after all; of whose private life her waiting-woman has left us an account that is neither overwrought nor crushing.

That book of Mme. du Hausset leaves a singular impression; it is written with a degree of *naïveté* and

ingenuousness which preserves a sort of virtue in the close vicinity of vice:

"'That is what the Court is, corrupt from the greatest to the smallest,' I said one day to Madame, who spoke to me of certain facts within my knowledge. 'I could tell you many more,' she said, 'but in that little chamber where you often sit you must overhear plenty.'"

Mme. de Pompadour, after the first dazzling moments of her fairyland were over, judged her situation for what it was; and though she continued to love the king, she retained no illusion as to his character, nor as to the sort of affection of which she was the object. She felt that she was to him a habit, and nothing else. "It is your staircase that the king loves," the little Maréchale de Mirepoix said to her: "he is so in the habit of going up and down it. But if he found another woman to whom he could talk of his hunting and his affairs as he does to you, it would be all the same to him at the end of three days." Mme. de Pompadour repeated those words to herself as being the exact and melancholy truth. She had everything to fear at every minute, for, with such a man, *everything was possible.* A smile from him, a more or less gracious look proved nothing:

"You do not know him, my dear," she said one day to Mme. du Hausset, with whom she had been talking of some rival with whom her enemies were trying to supplant her: "if he meant to put her to-night

into my apartment, he would treat her coldly before the world, and treat me with the greatest affection." He acquired that dissembling habit from his early education under Cardinal de Fleury. "Ah!" she exclaimed one day with a secret sense of her misery, "Ah! my life is like that of the Christian, a perpetual struggle. It was not so with the women who obtained the good graces of Louis XIV."

Mme. de Pompadour may be considered as the last in date of kings' mistresses, correctly so-called. After her it is impossible to descend and enter decently into the history of the Du Barry. The kings and emperors who have succeeded one another in France until our day have been either too virtuous, too despotic, too gouty, too repentant, or too good fathers of families to permit themselves such inutilities; at the most, one perceives a few vestiges. The race of kings' mistresses may therefore be said to be, if not extinct, at least greatly interrupted, and Mme. de Pompadour remains to our eyes the last in sight in our history, and the most brilliant.

All this while, there was,—let us remember it in order not to be unjust in our severity,—there was in the bosom of that very Versailles, and of that corrupt Court, a little reserved corner, a sort of asylum of all the virtues and domestic pieties, in the person and in the family of the Dauphin, father of Louis XVI. This estimable prince, and all who surrounded him, his mother, his wife, his royal sisters, all his household,

made the most absolute and the most silent contrast to the scandals and the intrigues of the rest of the Court. It is a striking contrast to compare his premature end and his death, so courageously Christian, with the miserable death-scene of the king, his father. We are told that during his last autumn on earth (1765), he wished to see again the little grove at Versailles which bore his name and where he had played in childhood; on seeing the trees half-stripped, he said, with a sort of presentiment: "Already the fall of the leaf!" Then he added, instantly: "But we can see the skies better."

The Dauphin, son of Louis XV, whatever homage we may render to his virtues, was not of those of whom we can say otherwise than by a poetic fiction: *Tu Marcellus eris.* All in him reveals a saint, but it was a king that the monarchy and France required. Louis XVI, heir to his father's virtues, did not know how to be a king; and nothing justifies us in supposing that the father, had he lived, was of the stuff to make one. It is clear to all, that, with the death of Louis XV, the monarchy was condemned already, and the race cut off. Let us see now how Louis XV died.

We cannot say: "Thus die voluptuaries," for the voluptuous often end with firmness and courage. Louis XV did not die like Sardanapalus; he died as Mme. Du Barry died later, flinging herself with clasped hands at the feet of the executioner and crying out: "One

instant more!" Louis XV said something of the same kind to the Faculty assembled around him.

The man who watched, and wrote down upon the spot, the pusillanimities of the king during his last illness was M. de Liancourt, Grand-Master of the Wardrobe; the same whom every one has since known and venerated under the name of the Duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, who did not die till 1827.[1] This was the witness; one of the most virtuous of citizens; a man of '89, the kind of man that was, at that epoch, being developed in all ranks, but particularly among the enlightened and generous young nobles. A spectacle

[1] This paper, the manuscript of which is preserved in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, is very long, and gives a detailed account of the base intrigues that went on around the deathbed of Louis XV. It breaks off abruptly before the death took place. Only a few brief extracts, relating to Louis XV himself, can be given here.—Tr.

"Wednesday, April 27, 1774, the king being at Trianon, felt unwell, with pains in his head, chills, and lumbago. The fear he always had of being ill, or the hope of feeling better by exercise, induced him to make no change in the orders given the night before. He started for the hunt in a carriage, but feeling worse, stayed in the coach and did not mount his horse. He complained of illness, and returned about half past 5 o'clock to Trianon, and shut himself up with Mme. Du Barry. . . . In the night he felt worse and sent to wake up Lemonnier [his physician] and Mme. Du Barry. Anxiety and fear laid hold of him, but Lemonnier, who knew his propensity to be frightened by nothing at all, considered his anxiety as no more than the effect of his natural disposition. So with regard to the pains of which the king complained, he reduced them in his own mind by three-fourths. This is what always happens to effeminate persons; they are like liars, who by dint of having abused the credulity of others lose the right to be believed when they really ought to be. Mme. Du Barry, who knew the king as well as Lemonnier, thought as he did about the pains of which the king complained, but she regarded as an advantage to her

like that of the deathbed of Louis XV was well fitted to stir noble hearts and turn them sick at the sight of such base intrigues. If we wish to know the

all the care she could give him, and the solicitude she could show for him. . . .

"It got to be three o'clock, and no one had been admitted to the king's room. It was only imperfectly known that he was not well, but by the little news that transpired people judged it was merely a slight indisposition. Mme. Du Barry had informed M. d'Aiguillon (prime minister, whose tool she was), who was at Versailles, and by his advice she formed the project of keeping the king at Trianon as long as his indisposition lasted. By this means she would be enabled to spend more time alone with him, and, more than that, to gratify her aversion to M. le Dauphin, Mme. la Dauphine, and Mesdames [the king's daughters], by keeping the king away from them, and rendering their conduct toward him embarrassing to them. The uncertainty felt by Lemonnier as to the result of this indisposition, the inconvenience of the service in so small a room, the scandal and indecency to which this prolonged stay would give rise—nothing of all this could turn Mme. Du Barry from this unreasonable and indecent project, formed especially to defy the royal family. . . .

"When I say that Mme. Du Barry willed, I mean that M. d'Aiguillon willed, for this woman, like three-quarters of the women of her kind, had no will. All her wills were fancies, and all those fancies were diamonds, ribbons, money. The homage of all France would have been quite indifferent to her. She was wearied by the business her odious favourite (Aiguillon) wished her to attend to, and had no pleasure except in squandering on gowns and jewels the millions which the business of the controller-general supplied to her in profusion. Whether from fear, liking, or weakness, she was given over to the despotic will of M. d'Aiguillon, who employed her to assist him in wreaking vengeance on his enemies, and otherwise using for his own ends all the influence she possessed over the apathetic weakness of the king. . . .

"However, the fever continued during the night with some force; it even increased; the pains in the head grew worse, and it was announced that at eight o'clock in the morning the king would be bled. . . .

"It was now midday; the doctors who had been summoned began to

Duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, the results of his life can be seen everywhere, his memory lives again in numerous institutions of benevolence. It was he

appear. We of the wardrobe were also called in. I found the king surrounded by a crowd of physicians and surgeons, all of whom he was questioning with indescribable anxiety and lack of courage about his state, about the progress of his illness, about the remedies they would give him in such or such a case. The doctors reassured him, and diagnosed his illness as catarrhal fever. But they showed much more uneasiness in the way they treated him than in what they said; They had already announced that they should make the second bleeding at half past three o'clock; and perhaps a third at midnight, or early next morning, if the second did not relieve the pains in the head. The king, whose repeated questions had driven the doctors to make him this answer, showed much displeasure: 'A third bleeding!' he said; 'why that means an illness! A third bleeding will bring me very low; I will not have a third bleeding. Why this third bleeding? . . .

"The cowardice of the doctors which made them give up the third bleeding if the second did not produce great relief, did not prevent them from thinking it would probably be necessary; and to satisfy both their promise and their conscience, they decided to make the second bleeding so abundant that it would take the place of a third. Consequently, they drew from the king the amount of four large *palettes* full. Kings must be accustomed to see their fame and their health the plaything of the intrigues and self-interest of all who surround them. The king again showed himself for just what he was during and before this bleeding; his fear, his pusillanimity were inconceivable; he had vinegar brought to hold under his nose, and said, when he saw the surgeon approach, that he should faint; he made four men hold him, and gave his pulse to all the Faculty to feel, asking the same questions of the doctors at every instant: about his illness, about the remedies, about his state: 'You tell me I am not so ill, and that I shall get well soon,' he said to them, 'but you do not believe a word of it; you ought to tell me.' They protested that they were telling him the truth; but for all that the king did not whine, nor complain, nor cry out the less. His fears and his terror were not those of a touching anxiety, but those of a cowardly and revolting weakness. . . .

"The quantity of doctors who surrounded him had made me pity him

who, thanks to his office as Grand-Master of the Wardrobe, entered the bedroom of Louis XVI in the middle of the night, and woke him to tell him of the taking

earlier in the day. Fourteen persons, each of whom had the right to approach and examine the patient, seemed to me a positive torture. But the king did not think so; anxiety and fear made the importunity precious to him. The Faculty was composed of six physicians, five surgeons, and three apothecaries; he would have liked to see the number increased. He made all fourteen of them feel his pulse six times an hour; and if the whole of the numerous Faculty were not in the room he sent for those who were absent, that he might be constantly surrounded by all of them; as if he hoped that with such satellites disease would not dare to approach his Majesty. I shall never forget that when Lemonnier told him it was necessary to show his tongue, he stuck it out at its full length, putting his hands before his eyes because the light hurt them, and he kept it out more than six minutes, only drawing it in to say (after Lemonnier's examination): 'Your turn, Lassonne': 'Yours, Borden': Yours, Lorry': 'Yours, and yours,'—until he had called up, one by one, all the doctors, who each testified in his own manner the satisfaction he felt at seeing the beauty and colour of that precious and royal morsel. It was the same a moment later, with his stomach, which it was necessary to feel; he made each physician, each surgeon, each apothecary defile before it, submitting eagerly to the examination, and calling them up, one after the other, in order. . . .

"It was now ten o'clock at night. The king had been changed from his large bed to a small one, for the convenience of taking care of him. His debility, his pains, his sluggishness were increasing; and, in spite of the opinion held by all of his fears and his timidity, it seemed very evident that he was at the beginning of some great illness. All Versailles was convinced of this, except those who chose not to be. The doctors were equally convinced, and their silence showed it. They spoke only to each other, and they put off pronouncing an opinion on the nature of the illness till the morrow.

"The royal family, very uneasy, came back after their supper to see the king, and were preparing to remain very late in a side chamber to see how the night would turn, when, all of a sudden, the light brought close to the king's face without the usual precaution, revealed red blotches on his forehead and cheeks. The doctors who surrounded

of the Bastille: "Why, it is a revolt!" cried the king: "No, sire," he answered, "it is a revolution." Such was the man who, young and condemned by the

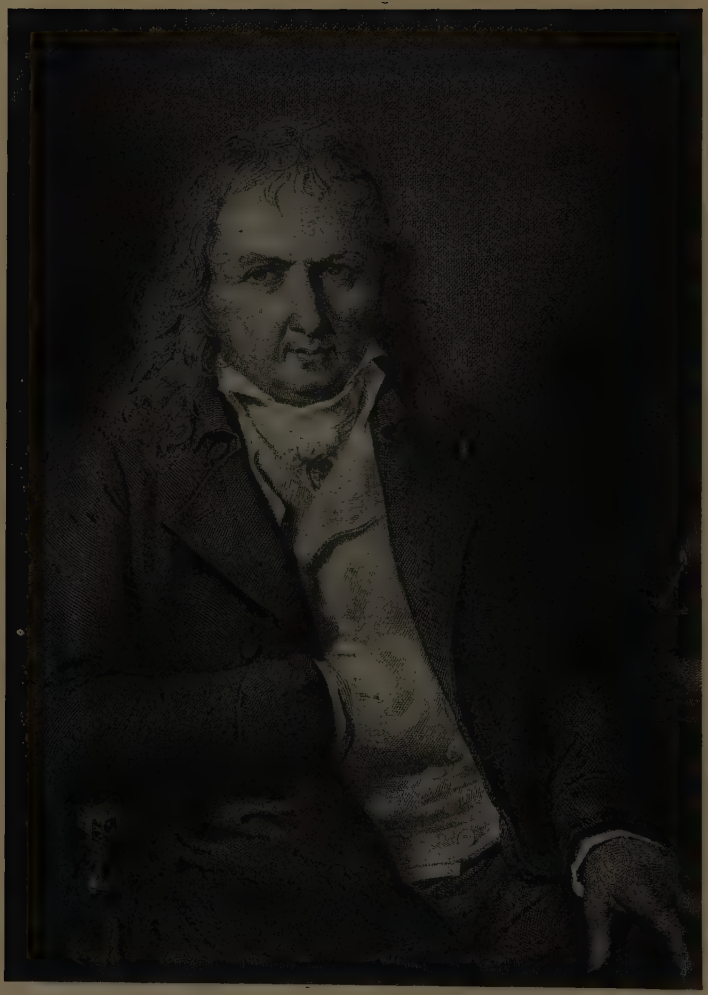
the bed, when they saw those blotches, some of which had risen above the skin in pustules, looked at one another with one accord, and their astonishment was a confession of their ignorance. Lemonnier had seen the king for four days with pains in his loins, with faintness and nausea, and the other four had seen those symptoms increasing since midday, yet none of them, in spite of the feeling of the pulse, had suspected that the disease could be smallpox. Every one in the room saw it at that moment, and it was needless to be a doctor to be convinced of it.

"The doctors left the room immediately, and announced to the royal family the nature of the illness, saying that it was well understood, that the king was well prepared for it, and that all would go right. The first care of every one was to induce M. le Dauphin, who had never had the smallpox, to leave the apartment. Mme. la Dauphine took him away. M. le Comte de Provence, M. le Comte d'Artois and their wives went away also. Mesdames alone remained. They had never had the smallpox either, and they were afraid of it; but they would not yield to the representations we made to them; they showed themselves immovable in the purpose they had formed of not abandoning their father. It is difficult to believe that this act of filial piety excited very little public interest. Those who spoke of it contented themselves by saying it was very right; but three-quarters of the people never spoke or thought of it at all. This indifference, this coldness to an action that was truly fine and touching, and one they would have highly praised in private persons, was produced by the dull, meagre lives of Mesdames, who were known to be without desires for good, without soul, without character, without sincerity, without love for their father. People were convinced that it was either to make themselves talked of, or else mechanically that they subjected themselves to so evident a danger. Their customary idleness made some persons think they did it for an occupation; others believed that Mme. de Narbonne and Mme. de Durfort, two well-known intriguers, had urged Madame Adélaïde and Madame Victoire to this conduct, hoping to gain in the end some good from it themselves; as for Madame Sophie, who was a species of automaton, as lacking in mind as she was in character, she followed, with her usual apathy, the will and projects of her sisters.

"But the best reason of all for the little impression made upon the

duties of his office to witness the last moments of Louis XV, was seized with the idea of writing down what he witnessed that posterity might profit by it.

Court and upon Paris by the really estimable conduct of Mesdames was the man himself, who was the object of their self-devotion. The king was so degraded, despicable, so thoroughly despised, that nothing done for him had the right or power to interest the public. What a lesson for kings! They need to learn that while we are obliged, in spite of ourselves, to pay them outward marks of respect and submission, we judge their actions sternly, and we avenge ourselves for their authority over us by the most profound contempt when their conduct has no aim for the public good, and is not worthy of our admiration. But as for this king, no stern effort was needed to judge of him as he was judged by his whole kingdom."



BERNARDIN DE SAINT-PIERRE.

After the painting by Lafitte.

Portraits

of the

Eighteenth Century

Historic and Literary

Part II

Prévost—Mme. de Lambert—Mme. Necker—Diderot—Rousseau —Grimm—Mme. d'Épinay—Buffon—Saint-Pierre—Frederick the Great—Margravine of Baireuth—Beaumarchais—Necker—Marie-Antoinette

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Abbé Prévost.

1697–1763.

Abbé Prévost.

THE depressing effect produced upon us by great libraries, wherein are gathered the works of so many dead and gone generations, has often been likened to the effect of a cemetery peopled with tombs. It seems to us that the similitude is never more marked than when one enters such a library, not with a vague curiosity or a too zealous desire to be at work, but impelled by a special purpose to do homage to some chosen name, and to fulfil a vow of studious respect to a memory. If, however, the object of our study, and in a certain sense of our devotion, on that day, happens to be one of the few illustrious dead whose words fill the ages, the effect cannot be the same; in such case the altar appears too luminous; it constantly gives forth a powerful glamour which dispels the listless sense of regret and suggests thoughts of duration and life alone. Nor is mere mediocrity calculated to give birth to a sentiment so subtle; the impression that it causes is altogether sterile, and resembles weariness or pity.

But we are more especially impelled to ponder, and innumerable thoughts that go to the root of all moral

science suggest themselves to our minds, when we have to do with one of those men, half famous and half forgotten, in our memory of whom the light and the shadow blend, so to speak,—some one of whose works still lives and stands in a bright light which seems to illuminate the dust and obscurity of all the rest,—when we approach one of those meritorious and once brilliant celebrities, of whom there have been so many in the world, beautiful to-day in their silence, with the beauty of a ruined cloister, half-dismantled, deserted, and falling in decay. Now, apart from a very small number of resplendent and fortunate names, which, by the opportuneness of their coming into the world, by the constant favour of their stars, and also by the immensity of the things human and divine which they were the first to reproduce with matchless splendour, retain the immortal privilege of never growing old—apart from these, this dismal but inevitable fate is common to all those in the ranks of men of letters who bear the title of talent and even of genius.

The most unanimous and most fully deserved contemporary admiration can do nothing to forestall it; neither the most humble resignation, nor the most obstinate resistance, hastens or delays the inevitable moment when the great writer, the great poet, enters the shadow of posterity; that is to say, when the generations whose soul and joy he was have abandoned the stage to others, and he himself falls from the fervent

ABBÉ PRÉVOST.

From the copper engraving by G. F. Schmidt.

and confused laudation of his fellow-men to the indifference, not ungrateful but respectful, which is in most cases the final consecration of the completed monument. Doubtless some pilgrims of genius, as Byron calls them, continue to visit it and take one another's places about it until the end; but society as a whole has turned its attention elsewhere and frequents other scenes. A very large part of the renown of Walter Scott and Chateaubriand is already buried in darkness.

These reflections have occurred to us in connection with Abbé Prévost, and we believe them to be among those which, at the present day, would most naturally occur to him, if he could view himself in the past. Not that, during his long and laborious career, he ever actually obtained that something which is called glory; rather than glory he had a widely diffused celebrity, and obtained the honours due to talent, without rising to true genius. He was, however, if we converse for a moment with him in the vaguely affable style of Louis XIV,—he was, take him for all in all, a happy and dexterous genius, of extensive learning and lucid intelligence, with a boundless memory, inexhaustible in product, equally at home in serious and entertaining narrative, renowned for the charm of his style and the liveliness of his descriptions, whose works, the instant they appeared, were, as was said at the time, "the joy of sensitive hearts and ardent imaginations." In truth, his novels had a prodigious

vogue; they were imitated on all sides; sometimes continuations of them were written under his name, as was the case with *Cléveland.* The booksellers called for "something by Abbé Prévost," as they had formerly called for something by Saint-Evremond. He did not often leave them in distress, and his works, including *Le Pour et Contre* and the *Histoire Générale des Voyages,* go far beyond a hundred volumes.

Of all these estimable productions, among which there is a goodly share of original creations, what is there left that people remember and read to-day? If, in our younger days, we ever found ourselves within reach of some old family library, we may have read *Cléveland, Le Doyen de Killerine,* or the *Mémoires d'un Homme de Qualité,* which our uncles or our fathers recommended to us; but, failing an opportunity of this kind, people esteem them on faith and do not read them. And if by any chance we do open one of them, we never go on to the end, any more than with *Astrée* or *Clélie;* the style is too antiquated for our taste, and repels by its intricacies instead of attracting. *Manon Lescaut* alone still triumphs by favour of its artful negligence; its unadorned freshness and bloom are immortal. This little *chef-d'œuvre,* to which Abbé Prévost gave birth on a day of good fortune, and without more trouble assuredly than to the numberless episodes, half real, half imaginary, with which his works are strewn, holds his name for ever above the flood of the years, and gives him a sure

foothold in the ranks of the élite of writers and inventors. *Manon Lescaut* exists for ever, and despite the innumerable revolutions in taste and fashions which eclipse her real power, she may safely maintain with respect to her own fate that languishing and playful indifference with which we are familiar in her. Some people perhaps, in whispers, call the book a little weak, and far too simple in metaphysics and in subtle distinctions; but when the modern seasoning has evaporated, when the tiresome garish splendour of the present day has faded away, that incomprehensible girl will still be the same as ever,—simply the fresher by contrast. The writer who drew her for us will continue to be appreciated in our calmer moments, as one who attained the most incredible depths of passion by means of a simple, natural tale, and who, in that same tale, employed his pen in a way dear to certain hearts in all ages. He is therefore of those whom oblivion will never submerge, or, at all events, not until that time when, the taste for sound and healthy things having altogether vanished, we need no longer regret to die.

Abbé Prévost's open and kindly countenance, the decorous refinement of his language, afford us glimpses, unknown to him, of a profoundly tender inward sensitiveness, and, beneath his moral generalisations and the multiplicity of his tales, it is easy to detect the traces of an exceedingly painful personal experience. In truth, his life was the first of his novels, and

in some sort the material of which all the others were constructed.

He was born, near the close of the seventeenth century, in April, 1697, at Hesdin in Artois, of an honourable, even noble, family; his father was *procureur du roi* for the district. Young Prévost obtained his early education at the Jesuits' school in his native town, and later went to the Collège d'Harcourt, in Paris, to add to his knowledge of rhetoric. He received particular attention on account of the rare talents which he exhibited betimes, and the Jesuits had already lured him as far as the novitiate, when, on a certain day (he was sixteen years old), being assailed by worldly ideas, he dropped it all to enlist as a simple private. The last war of Louis XIV was drawing to a close; commissions in the army had become very hard to obtain; but he cherished the hope, common to many young men, of being promoted at the first opportunity; and as he himself said afterward, in reply to those who spoke slightingly of that part of his life, he "was not so ill-provided in the way of birth and fortune, that he might not hope to make his way successfully." However, as he grew weary of waiting, and as the war came to an end, he returned to La Flèche, to the Jesuit fathers, who welcomed him with all sorts of caresses. He was seduced thereby almost to the point of definitively entering the Order, and he composed an ode in honour of Saint François Xavier, which has not been preserved. But a

new fit of restlessness seized him, and leaving the convent once more, he resumed the profession of arms, "with more distinction and enjoyment," he says; which means with a commission, a lieutenancy or something else. Details concerning this critical period of his life are lacking.[1] We have but a few words from himself, which afford sufficient food for thought, and which disclose the complexion and tendency of his sentiments during the tempests of his early youth.

"Several years passed," he says [in the profession of arms]; "I will admit, in the words of M. de Cambrai, that, as I was of an ardent temper and keenly alive to pleasure, wisdom demanded many precautions which I overlooked. I leave my readers to judge what, from twenty to twenty-five years of age, were likely to be the passions and sentiments of a man who wrote *Cléveland* at thirty-five or thirty-six. The unfortunate end of a too tender connection led me at last to *the tomb;* that is the name that I give to the venerable Order in which I buried myself, and in which I remained for some time so truly dead that my parents and my friends had no idea what had become of me."

This "venerable Order" of which he speaks, and which he entered when he was about twenty-four, was that of the Benedictines of the Congregation of Saint-Maur; he stayed there five or six years, engaged

[1] In some book of *ana,* I forget the title, the story is told that Prévost having fallen in love with a lady, presumably at Hesdin, his father, who viewed the intrigue with an unfavourable eye, went to the lady's door one evening, to berate his son as he came out, and that the latter, in the sudden rush that he made to escape, jostled his father so roughly that the old gentleman died from the effects of the blow. If this is not an atrocious libel, it is a fable, and Prévost has enough catastrophes in his life without this.

in religious duties and in assiduous study; we shall see him take his leave of it in due time.

And so that ardent nature, far too easily led by successive impulses, was unable to settle upon anything; it was one of those flexible natures which can readily be worked upon and swayed, but not held fast. He had drawn from the sincerity of his own character, and had developed, by virtue of the excellent education he had received, a multitude of honourable, delicate, and pious sentiments, equally adapted, it would seem, to do him honour among men and to sanctify him in retirement, and he was unable to decide upon either course of life; he tried them both in turn, again and again; remorse tended to perpetuate his vacillation; the world, its pleasures, the diversity of its events, of its pictures, the tender quality of its attachments, became, after a few months' absence, irresistible temptations for that prematurely weaned heart; and, on the other hand, no one of those delights availed to satisfy him at the moment of enjoyment. Then repentance and a sort of ever-increasing irritation against an always triumphant enemy drove him back at the first onset to the other extreme, when the austerity of the religious life speedily allayed his zeal; and after a fresh struggle, in a contrary direction to the last, he quitted his cell anew for a life of adventure. A fragment of a letter has been preserved, written to one of his brothers at the beginning of his sojourn with the Benedictines; it relates to his life at Saint-

Ouen, about 1721. In it he describes this moral condition of his mind in pleasing, ingenuous touches which show clearly enough that he is not cured.

"I know the weakness of my heart, and I realise how essential it is for its repose that I should not apply myself to barren studies which would leave it parched and listless; if I wish to be happy in a religious life, I must retain in all its strength the impulsion of grace which has led me thither; I must be incessantly on my guard to keep at a distance whatever might weaken it; I see only too plainly every day of what I should once more become capable if I should lose sight for one moment of the great rule, or even if I should look with the slightest favour upon certain images which present themselves only too often to my mind, and which would possess only too much power to lead me astray, even though they be half-effaced. How hard it is, my dear brother, to recover a little strength when one has become accustomed to one's weakness; and how much it costs to fight for victory when one has long found delight in allowing one's self to be conquered!"

Abbé Prévost's ideal, the dream of his youth, the model of virtuous felicity which he set before himself, and which was long postponed by his too impulsive errors, was a mixture of study and of society, of religion and decorous pleasure, the vision of which he dwelt upon with delight on many occasions. Once engaged by indissoluble bonds, he strove that every image too exciting and too favourable to desire should be carefully excluded from this somewhat chimerical scheme, in which duty was the gauge of sensual pleasure. One loves to expatiate with him, in many a passage of the *Mémoires d'un Homme de Qualité* or of *Cléveland,* upon those meditative walks, those readings in solitude, among the woods and streams, an abbey

always in the background; upon those moral conversations between friends which "Horace and Boileau," he tells us, "have set down as one of the most delightful elements of which they make a happy life to consist." His Christian doctrine is mild and temperate, as we see, accommodating, but unsullied; it is a formal doctrine "which ordains at the same time the practice of morality and belief in the mysteries"; yet it is in nowise merciless, but founded on mercy and on love, with a tinge of atticism; for he had passed through the novitiate with the Jesuits, and had dissolved the connection with entire outspokenness, although with ever-grateful memories.

Boileau, whom I reproach myself for not having praised warmly enough on this point as on several others, was inspired by this spirit of steadfast piety in his Letter to Abbé Renaudot. The admirably drawn character of Tiberge, in *Manon Lescaut,* shows all its enlightenment and all its virtues combined in action. Amid the upheavals of his youth and the material exigencies which were the result of them, Prévost clung with a constant effort to this moral rectitude, instinct with humility, and he deserved to reap its fruits in his riper years. He retained throughout his life an affectionate regard for his first masters, and the impressions that he received from them never left him. It is possible, if the truth be told, that philosophy, then in its infancy, fascinated him momentarily in the interval between his departure from

La Flèche and his joining the Benedictines, and that the character of Cléveland represents some personal reminiscences of that period. But at bottom he was of a submissive disposition, not prone to argue, thirsting for light from above, inclined to spiritual things, and extremely credulous of the invisible; an intellect of the type of Malebranche in metaphysics; one of those minds which, as he says of his Cécile, "fly with amazing ardour of feeling toward an object which is uncertain; which aspire to the joy of loving boundlessly and immeasurably," and which think themselves impeded by the "darkness of the senses" and the weight of the flesh. He obeyed an impulsion of that mystic voice when he joined the Benedictines; but he relied too much upon his strength, or perhaps, because he was exceedingly distrustful of himself, he made haste solemnly to forbid himself any second offence of backsliding. The sacrifice once accomplished, he recovered his lucidity of mind. "I realised," he says, "that this ardent heart of mine was still burning under the ashes. The loss of my liberty afflicted me to tears. It was too late. I sought consolation for five or six years in the pleasures of study; my books were my faithful friends, *but they were dead like myself.*"

In truth, study, which, according to his own expression, has charms of its own, but charms of a melancholy sort, and always the same,—especially that kind of study, serious, interminable, monotonous

as a penance, with no admixture of original work and of lighter themes,—might suffice for the life of a Dom Martenne, but not for that of Dom Prévost. To be sure, he was fitted for it, but so he was for too many other more alluring pursuits. He was employed in several establishments of the Order one after another: at Saint-Ouen, in Rouen, where he had a polemical discussion with a Jesuit named Le Brun, in which he had the advantage; at the abbey of Le Bec, where, while delving deep in theology, he made the acquaintance of a great nobleman, retired from Court, who perhaps gave him the idea of his first novel; at Saint-Germer, where he taught the humanities; at Evreux, and at the Blancs-Manteaux in Paris, where he preached with wonderful success; and finally at Saint-Germain-des-Prés, a sort of capital of the Order, where his talents were applied, last of all, to the *Gallia Christiana,* of which almost an entire volume is said to be by him. At this time, according to all appearances, he began to write the *Mémoires d'un Homme de Qualité,* while, by virtue of the multitude of interesting anecdotes, which he told marvellously well, he was the delight of the nightly vigils of the cloister.

A trivial grievance, which was simply a pretext, was the ostensible cause, but it was in reality his thoughts, the course of which turned him more strongly than ever in other directions, which led him to solicit at Rome his transfer to a less rigorous branch of the Order; his choice fell upon Cluny. His

petition was granted; the brief was to be promulgated by the Bishop of Amiens on a stated day; Prévost relied upon it, and early in the morning made his escape from the convent, leaving letters for his superiors in which he set forth his reasons. As the result of an intrigue of which he knew nothing down to the very last moment, the brief was not promulgated, and his position as a deserter became so uncomfortable that he could see no other resource than flight to Holland. The general of the Congregation did, to be sure, make a friendly attempt to reopen the doors to him; but Prévost, having already started, was not informed of it.

This momentous step once taken, he had to accept all the consequences of it. Rich in knowledge, inured to study, expert in languages, bursting, so to speak, with reminiscences and adventures from his own experiences or learned from others, which he had silently stored away in his mind, he seized his ready and flowing pen, never to lay it down again; and by his romances, his compilations, his translations, his journals, his anecdotes, he easily opened for himself a large place in the literary world.

His flight was in 1727 or 1728; he was thirty-one years old, and he remained away from France at least six years, partly in Holland and partly in England. In the early days of his exile appeared the *Mémoires d'un Homme de Qualité,* also a volume translated from President De Thou's *Universal History,*[1] and a

[1] [De Thou wrote in Latin.—Tr.]

Histoire Métallique du Royaume des Pays-Bas, also a translation. *Cléveland* came next, then *Manon Lescaut,* and *Le Pour et Contre,* the publication of which, begun in 1733, was not finished until 1740. Prévost had returned to France when he published *Le Doyen de Killerine,* in 1735. As this is not a full inventory, nor even a general criticism of our author's numerous writings, we will touch only upon those which will help us to paint him.

The *Mémoires d'un Homme de Qualité* seems to us —apart from *Manon,* which, in truth, is simply a charming episode by way of postscript—seems to us beyond controversy the most natural, the most sincere, the best preserved of the romances of Abbé Prévost,—the one in which, being as yet unsurfeited with the romantic and the fictitious, he confines himself more to what he has felt inwardly or observed in his immediate neighbourhood. Whereas, in his later romances, he loses himself in broad expanses of territory and affects outlandish characters which he clothes with hybrid peculiarities, and whose verisimilitude, which was questioned even then, cannot sustain a glance to-day,—in these *Mémoires,* on the other hand, he sketches for us to perfection, and without fixed design, the manners and sentiments of fashionable society toward the close of the age of Louis XIV. The satirical side, which Le Sage prefers, is altogether lacking here; the vulgarity and ribaldry which constantly made themselves manifest beneath that fair exterior have no

place in Prévost's work. I always omit *Manon* and her Paris of the time of the "System," [1] her Paris of vice and of filth, in which ordure of all sorts is heaped up, although only incidentally, be it remembered, and although strewn about with no design to make it prominent, and illumined from end to end with the same reflection of sincere feeling. But the society ordinarily pictured in Prévost's works is a decorous and polished society, observed at a little distance by a man who, after certainly having had a taste of it, had regretted it bitterly in the depths of his province and of the cloister; it is a refined, gallant society, with high standards of honour, such as Louis XIV would have liked to establish; society of the sort that Boileau and Racine described as their ideal, which is within range of the Court, but which often abstains therefrom. Prévost freely modifies his tales, makes them dignified, serious, or pathetic, and is easily roused to enthusiasm.

His romance—yes, his romance, notwithstanding the *fille de joie* and the swindler whom we know so well—descends in an almost direct line from *Astrée, Clélie,* and the romances of Madame de La Fayette. There is not a suspicion of laboured composition, or of art, in his first work, any more than in the succeeding ones; the marquis tells what has happened to him

[1] [The gigantic and disastrous swindle of which the Scotsman John Law was the inventor, and which kept all Paris in a ferment for several years (1717–1720), was known as the "Mississippi System."—Tr.]

and what others have told him about themselves; it is all commingled, and it goes on at random; no proportion between the parts; the light purposely equalised; a delightful, rapid style, jumping about at haphazard, but with an imperceptible instinct of good taste; hurrying over beaten paths, intervals, preambles, everything that we should carefully describe to-day; travelling through the country in a smooth-rolling carriage, with the curtains drawn; leaping, if his hero happens to be aboard a vessel, "over an infinitude of ropes and nautical instruments," without the inclination or the ability to call a single one by name; and, in his extraordinary ignorance, dilating times without number upon a few Court scenes, which are repeated again and again, and the most affecting of which are without an adequate setting. The work is clearly divided into two parts: the author, seeing that the first had succeeded, fastened the other to it. In this first part, which is the shorter, after moralising at the outset upon grand passions, distinguishing them from concupiscence pure and simple, and striving to discover therein a special design of Providence to effect unknown ends, the marquis tells of his father's misfortunes, his own, his travels in England and Germany, his captivity in Turkey, and the death of his dear Selima, whom he had married there, and with whom he had come to Rome.[1]

[1] While he was imprisoned in Turkey, his master, Salem, tries to convert him to belief in the Koran; and when the marquis, like a good

It is his inconsolable grief for that loss which leads him to say with an accent of sincere conviction quite as persuasive as our pompous obscurities of to-day: "If tears and sighs may not bear the name of pleasure, it is none the less true that they are infinitely sweet to a person mortally afflicted." Driven by his despair to take refuge in religion in the Abbey of ——, where he remains three years, the marquis is taken thence, by dint of well-meaning violence, by M. le duc de ——, who begs him to act as his son's guide in various journeys. They go to Spain first of all, then visit Portugal and England, the old marquis under the name of M. de Renoncourt, the young man under that of Marquis de Rosemont. The mentor's advice to his ward, his constant and respectful zeal for "the glory of the amiable marquis"; the books that he recommends to him

Christian, declaims against the sensual impurity sanctioned by Mahomet, Salem argues with him thus: "God, as he did not choose to manifest himself to mankind all at once, made himself known at first by figures of speech only. The first law, which was that of the Jews, is filled with them. It proposed to man, as the motive and reward of virtue, naught save carnal joys and gross pleasures. The law of the Christians, which followed the Jewish law, was much more perfect because it attributed everything to the spirit, which is unquestionably superior to the body. That was the second state through which God was pleased to make men pass. And now, lastly, it is no longer corporal pleasures alone, as in the law of the Jews, nor spiritual pleasures alone, as in the gospel of the Christians, but felicity of body and spirit alike, which the Alcoran promises to all true believers." It is an interesting fact that Salem, that is to say, our Abbé Prévost, imagined a species of union of the Jewish and Christian laws in the Mussulman law, by a process of reasoning very like that which has been so boldly developed in our own day in Saint-Simonism.

and allows him to read—*Télémaque* and *La Princesse de Clèves;* why he forbids him to speak the Spanish language; his solicitude that, in a man of his rank, destined to play a part in the great affairs of the world, study should not become "a passion as in a fellow of the University"; the enlightenment that he gives him concerning the mutual inclination of the sexes and the singularities of the heart,—all these details possess, in the romance, an indescribable savour which does more, and at less cost, to place before us the manners and the tone of the society of that day, than our oceans of local colour are able to do. The marquis's love for Dona Diana, the murder of that beauty, and, above all, the death-bed marriage, have an interest which corresponds, in the category of romance, to that of *Bérénice* in tragedy.

After the journey to Spain and Portugal, and during the voyage to Holland, M. de Renoncourt unexpectedly meets on board the ship his two nephews, sons of Amulem, Selima's brother; and this attractive *turquerie,* cast in the path of our French gentlemen, causes only so much surprise as is fitting. Upon landing, the excellent tutor finds his brother-in-law in person, and we listen while they narrate their respective adventures since their separation. As for these sons of Amulem, these nephews of M. de Renoncourt, it happens that the more charming of the two is a niece, who had been disguised in that fashion for greater safety during the voyage; but the marquis,

who was so profoundly afflicted by the death of his Diana, is not on his guard against this innocent deception, and, by dint of loving his young friend Memisces, he unwittingly becomes unfaithful to her whom he has mourned so bitterly.

Generally speaking, these characters are thoughtless, changeable, guided by first impressions, and easy-going to a degree that makes one smile at times; love is born in them suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, as in idle and unoccupied minds; they have wonderful dreams; they give or receive sword-thrusts with incredible celerity; they are restored by mysterious powders and oils; they swoon and recover consciousness swiftly at every shock of grief or joy. They belong to the race of refined gentlemen of that time, which the author has modified a little to suit himself. Young Rosemont in the highest rank, the Chevalier des Grieux [1] in the depths of degradation, retain the essential characteristics of that type and represent it with equal fidelity in its most divergent aspects. The first, despite his outbursts of passion and two or three quite involuntary murders, is already paving the way for all the honours due to the virtue of a Grandison; the chevalier, after a few knaveries and a homicide of little consequence, remains incontestably the most attractive, by virtue of his amiable bearing, and the most honourable of unfortunate wretches.

The line of demarcation between the marquises

[1] [The hero of *Manon Lescaut*.—Tr.]

—the one who is simply a gentleman of quality and the one who is son of a duke—is faithfully drawn; the ducal prerogative shines in all the splendour of prejudice. Excellent M. de Renoncourt's perplexity when his ward wishes to marry his niece; the remonstrances that he addresses to the poor child, asking her, with reference to the young man, "Have you forgotten what he was born?" his appeal, in his despair, to the marquis's father, the noble duke, who receives the news as if the affair were altogether too impossible, and waves it aside with an airy assumption of superiority, which in our eyes would be the last degree of impertinence,—these touches, which lapse of time has made interesting, cost Abbé Prévost nothing, and, from his kindly pen, conveyed no malicious implication. As much must be said of the old marquis's inclination for the lovely Lady R——. Prévost's only purpose was to make his hero perplexed and interesting; the element of comedy slipped in without design on his part; but it is comedy subtle to detect, tempered by kindliness, dominated by respect, and silenced by emotion,—comedy of the sort of which there is an infusion in Goldsmith's excellent character of Dr. Primrose.

I care much less for *Cléveland* than for the *Mémoires d'un Homme de Qualité;* in its day people may have formed a different judgment; to-day its improbabilities and chimeras make it almost as insipid reading as *Amadis.* We cannot go back to that

legendary geography, that *Pyramus and Thisbe* scenery, vaguely filled with cliffs, grottoes, and wild men. The only portions that are still fine are the philosophical arguments, tinged with a dignified melancholy, in which Cléveland and the Earl of Clarendon engage in several places. The quasi-psychological scrutiny to which the hero devotes his attention at the beginning of the sixth book shows us an enlightened probity and serene elevation of thought in harmony with the barrenest and most unsavoury practical consequences. The impotence of solitary philosophy when face to face with real ills is vividly laid bare, and the attempt at suicide with which Cléveland ends, sets forth for us and vividly clinches that moral doctrine—a doctrine more profound, I venture to assert, than it could have seemed at the time to its author.

As for the *Doyen de Killerine,* the last in date of Prévost's three great romances, it is a book which, although it drags sometimes and is unconscionably long, is after all infinitely pleasant reading, if one sets about it with a favourable prepossession. The worthy Dean of Killerine, a slightly ridiculous personage, after the style of Abraham Adams,[1] with his two humps, his crooked legs, and the wart on his forehead, the zealous and perplexed guardian of his brothers and his pretty sister, makes me think of a hen which has, by an oversight, hatched a brood

[1] [In Fielding's *Joseph Andrews.*—Tr.]

of little ducks; he is for ever engaged in travelling from Dublin to Paris, to bring back one or another of them who has left his side and waded out into the vast pond of the world. This sort of life, to which he is not at all adapted, involves him in situations most amusing for us, if not for him; as, for example, in the boudoir scene where the coquette tries to seduce him; or when, playing the part of a woman in an assignation at night, he receives against his will the passionate kisses of the lover, who does not see what he is about. Abbé Desfontaines, in his *Observations sur les Écrits Modernes*, among divers just criticisms of the plan of this work and its improbabilities, bears too severely upon the excellent dean when he calls him a lifeless character, and a man as intolerable to the reader as to his family. As for his family, I would not swear that he was always entertaining to them; but how can we, who are not lovers, be angry with him when he tells us: "I proved to him by incontrovertible logic that what he called invincible love, inviolable constancy, essential fidelity, were so many chimeras, which religion and the order of nature did not recognise in any such trifling signification."

Despite the dean's demonstrations, the love affairs of all those charming couples ran their course and became insanely complicated. The amiable Rose, in her heart logic, declared to her brother Patrice that, despite the fate that parted him from his sweetheart, he and she were worthy of envy, "and that pangs

caused by loyalty and affection merit the name of the most delicious happiness." For the rest, the *Doyen de Killerine* is perhaps, of all Prévost's romances, the one in which his manner of writing a book is most fully revealed. He does not write with a certain idea in his mind, or with a fixed goal in view; he allows himself to be guided by events, which intermingle as chance wills, and by the various sentiments which wind about them as a stream follows the windings of a valley.

Le Pour et Contre—"a periodical work of a new type, in which the contributors express their views freely upon anything likely to interest public curiosity in the field of the sciences, arts, books, etc., etc., without taking sides and without giving offence to any one"—was constantly true to its title. In form it resembled the English journals of Addison, Steele, and Johnson, with less finish and painstaking, but with much good sense, solid information, and frankness. Several numbers by the plagiarist Desfontaines and by Lefebvre de Saint-Marc, who continued some of Prévost's works, should not be charged to Prévost. English literature is criticised at great length in the persons of the most illustrious writers; we find there very full notices of Roscommon, Rochester, Wycherley, and Savage; copious and thoughtful analyses of Shakespeare; a translation of Dryden's *Mark Antony*, and of a comedy by Steele. Prévost had studied on the spot, and he held in unreserved admiration

England, her manners, her politics, her women, and her stage. The works, then recently published, of Le Sage, Madame de Tencin, Crébillon Fils, and Marivaux, are reviewed by their rival, as they successively appear, with an unerring accuracy of taste which always rests upon a basis of good-will. We feel that in secret he prefers the older writers, d'Urfé, and even Mademoiselle de Scudéry; but there is no trace anywhere of literary sensitiveness or of professional jealousy. He even does not hesitate on occasion (a display of generosity which it will be found difficult to credit) to quote approvingly, by their names, his brother journals, *Le Mercure de France* and *Le Verdun*. By way of compensation, when Prévost has occasion to speak of himself and of his own books, he does it with excellent grace, and does not haggle over words of praise. I find in number 36, volume iii, a review of *Manon Lescaut,* which ends thus:

"What art was requisite to interest the reader and arouse his compassion with respect to the fatal misfortunes which befall that corrupt creature! . . . The character of Tiberge, the chevalier's friend, is admirable. . . . I say nothing of the style of this work; there is neither cant, nor affectation, nor sophistical reflections; it is Nature herself who writes. How insipid a stiff and bedizened author appears in comparison! This writer does not run after wit, or, rather, after what is called by that name. It is not a laconic, constipated style, but flowing, copious, and expressive. It is all descriptions and sentiments, but lifelike descriptions and natural sentiments."

Once or twice Prévost was called upon to take the field in his own defence, and he always acquitted himself with dignity and moderation. Attacked by a

Jesuit in the *Journal de Trévoux,* on the subject of an article on Ramsay, he replied so temperately that the Jesuits realised their mistake and disavowed that first onslaught. He took up with more acrimony the slanders of Abbé Lenglet-Dufresnoy; but his moral justification demanded it, and we owe to that fortunate exigency some of the elucidations of the incidents of his life that we have made use of. A fact which we have not mentioned as yet, and which was a result of the same episode, is that, after his stay in Holland, Prévost had not recovered from that inclination for the tender passion whence so much suffering befell him. His face, they say, and his accomplishments had touched the heart of a young Protestant of high lineage, who wished to marry him. "To escape from this indiscreet passion," adds his biographer of 1764, Prévost crossed to England; but, as he took the lovelorn damsel with him, we are justified in the conjecture that he defended himself no more than half-heartedly against so insane a passion. Lenglet brutally accused him of allowing himself to be abducted by a charmer. Prévost replied that such abductions suited only the Médors and the Renauds, and he drew, by way of refutation, the following portrait—a portrait of himself:

"This Médor, so dear to the fair sex, is a man of thirty-seven to thirty-eight years of age, who bears upon his face and in his temper the marks of his earlier sorrows; who sometimes passes whole weeks in his library, and employs seven or eight hours of each day in study; who rarely seeks opportunities to make merry and even declines those

that are offered him; and who prefers an hour's conversation with a judicious friend to all that is called worldly pleasure and agreeable pastimes. He is a civil fellow, as the result of an excellent education, but not at all gallant; of a gentle, but melancholy disposition; sober and orderly in his conduct. I have described myself faithfully without looking to see whether the portrait flatters or wounds my self-esteem."

Le Pour et Contre offers us also a multitude of anecdotes of the day and strange happenings—veritable rough drafts of novels, and material therefor; the story of Dona Maria, and the life of the Duc de Riperda are the most noteworthy. An English scholar, Mr. Hooker, had conceived the idea of drawing, in an English journal, an ingenious parallel between the place of retirement of Cassiodorus of old, Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia, and the land of Forez in the time of Celadon.[1] Cassiodorus, already advanced in years, as we know, and out of humour with the Court by reason of the disgrace of Boethius, went into retirement at the monastery of Viviers, which he had built on one of his estates, and there devoted himself, with his monks, to the study of ancient manuscripts, to the cultivation of the land, and to the exercises of religion. Prévost descants with pleasure upon the joys of that diversified life in common; he evidently recognises his ideal in Cassiodorus's monastery; it is his Saint-Germain-des-Prés, his La Flèche, but with infinitely more sunshine, comfort, and entertainment. And as for the resemblance to Arcadia and Celadon's country, which the English writer points out with a

[1] [The lover of the beautiful Astrée, in d'Urfé's famous romance of that name.—Tr.]

touch of malice, he does not balk at it for an instant, for, he says, he is convinced that "in Arcadia and in the land of Forez, with such principles of equity and charity as the people of those countries are represented to hold, and with morals so pure as those attributed to them, they would need nothing but more accurate ideas on the subject of religion to make them very acceptable to Heaven."

After about six years of exile, Prévost received permission to return to France in the garb of a secular ecclesiastic. The Cardinal de Bissy, who had known him at Saint-Germain, and the Prince de Conti, proved to be most useful patrons; the latter appointed him his almoner. Thus re-established in a life of tranquillity, and raised above want, Prévost, who was still young, divided his time between the composition of numerous works and the cultivation of the brilliant society in which he sought relaxation. The labour of writing had become so familiar to him that it was no longer labour; he could let his pen run and carry on a conversation at the same time. We are bound to say that the voluminous writings with which the last half of his life overflows show the effects of this extreme facility, become a matter of habit. Whatever he undertakes, whether it be a compilation, a romance, a translation of Richardson, Hume, or Cicero, a *Histoire de Guillaume le Conquérant,* or a *Histoire des Voyages,* the style is always the same, agreeable, but monotonous in its fluency, always running on, and too swiftly to

be coloured by the variety of subjects touched upon. All differences are wiped out, all inequalities levelled, all raised surfaces smoothed down, in that swift stream of unvarying elegance. We will mention only one among the last productions of his prolix pen, the *Histoire d'une Grecque Moderne,* a pretty little romance, of which the plot is as subtle as it is vague. A young Greek woman, destined at first for the seraglio, then ransomed by a French nobleman, who wished to make her his mistress; her resistance to her emancipator's love, being perhaps less insensible to others than to him; this *perhaps* above all, which is never solved, which the proof flutters about, grazes again and again, but never succeeds in grasping;—in all this there is material for a charming and delicate work in the style of Crébillon Fils; Prévost's, although a graceful production, is executed a little too much at hazard.

Prévost was living thus, happy in study, in a select circle of friends, and in tranquillity of the senses, when a slight service in the way of correction of proofs, rendered to a satirical newsmonger, compromised him when he least expected it, and sent him off to Brussels (1741). From Brussels he went to Frankfort. All the powers in those places became interested in him. The offers of Frederick, King of Prussia, who was then recruiting academicians and soldiers, sought him out, but did not tempt him overmuch. It was the moment when the Diet of the Empire was assembled at Frankfort to elect an emperor. The

Maréchal de Belle-Isle, who was in the city, on the point of setting out for Bohemia, took the trouble to write in Prévost's behalf to Cardinal de Fleury. Negotiations were entered into, especially with M. de Maurepas, the Minister for Paris, in whose department the affair belonged, and who ought, it would seem, to have been less severe than most men in the matter of thoughtless evil-speaking and satire.

Abbé Prévost was a persuasive apologist, and as in this case the offence was trivial, M. de Maurepas allowed himself to be touched. On his return he resumed his position with the Prince de Conti, who set him at work arranging the material for a history of his family, while Chancellor d'Aguesseau employed him in editing the *Histoire Générale des Voyages.*[1] Amid these sources of favour, and of wealth as well, his disinterestedness never wavered; he refused to take part in schemes which would have been most profitable to him; he turned over his profits to his publisher, with whom, it has been observed (and I can well believe it), he was always on the most cordial terms. Indeed, I am afraid that, like some other too easy-going and reckless men of letters, he put himself at the mercy of the speculator. For him, he said, a garden, a cow, and two hens were enough.[2] A small house that he

[1] Chamfort relates that Chancellor d'Aguesseau had formerly given Abbé Prévost permission to print the first volumes of *Cléveland,* only on the express condition that Cléveland should turn Catholic in the last volume.

[2] Jean-Jacques, who had the same aspiration, but who did not

had bought at Saint-Firmin, near Chantilly, was his perspective of the future here on earth, the narrow but smiling horizon within which he proposed to confine his old age. He was on his way thither through the forest one day, alone (it was November 25, 1763), when a sudden attack of apoplexy brought him to the ground, unconscious. Some peasants came along; he was carried to the nearest village, and an ignorant surgeon, thinking that he was dead, proceeded at once to open his body. Prévost, aroused by the scalpel, recovered consciousness only to die in frightful agony.[1]

confine himself to it, had occasion, at the beginning of his career, to meet Abbé Prévost quite often at the house of their common friend Musard, at Passy; he mentions him in the *Confessions* (part ii, book viii), with an expression of regret for happy moments passed in a select company. Enumerating the distinguished men whom the excellent Musard had made his friends, he says: "At their head I place Abbé Prévost, a very amiable man of simple manners, whose heart gave life to his writings, which deserve immortality, and who had in company none of the vivid colouring which he imparted to his works." We may be permitted to believe that Abbé Prévost formerly had had that *colouring* in conversation, but that he had lost it to some extent as he grew older.

[1] [Although the official death certificate gives apoplexy as the cause of the death, and states that the body was not inspected by the officials until the following day, November 26th, there is very strong evidence, outside of the common tradition, in favour of the version in the text. In a later essay, apropos of the unveiling of a statue of Prévost, at Hesdin, in October, 1853, Sainte-Beuve, after quoting one of the orators of that occasion in contradiction of the story, adds: "However, I have before me a note written by Abbé Prévost's grand-niece, Mademoiselle Rosine Prévost, and dictated to her by her father, who was eighteen years old at the time of the abbé's death; and he must surely have been accurately informed of all the circumstances by his

The prior and monks of Saint-Nicolas-d'Acy, near Genlis, learning that Abbé Prévost was no more, and remembering that he had been a Benedictine, charitably, and also, no doubt, to assert their right, claimed his mortal remains; so he was taken to their house and buried, as if he had not ceased to be one of them. Dom Prévost's returning at last to the fold, and his interment in the convent close, or beneath the flags of the cloister, puts the final and concluding touch to the vicissitudes of his life.

Thus ended, by a catastrophe worthy of Cléveland, that romantic and restless existence. In literature Prévost belongs to the fading but still noble generation which immediately followed and completed the age of Louis XIV. He is a writer of the seventeenth century writing in the eighteenth; he is a contemporary of Le Sage, the younger Racine, Madame de Lambert, and Chancellor d'Aguesseau; and, in criticism, of Desfontaines and Lenglet-Dufresnoy. Of painters and sculptors that generation can count very few, and it does not worry over the lack; its only musician is the tuneful Rameau. Against the background of this

brother, who was with their uncle at the time. Now it is said in this note, that 'one day, when Abbé Prévost was returning from Chantilly to Saint-Firmin, where he lived, an attack of apoplexy laid him at the foot of a tree in the forest; that some peasants who came along took him to the curé's house in the nearest village; that the officers of justice were summoned in a great hurry, and ordered that the body be opened at once; and that a cry from the unfortunate man, who was not dead, stopped the knife and froze the spectators with horror.'"—Tr.]

peaceful decline of genius, Prévost stands out more distinctly than any other. Antedating by his style the reign of analysis and philosophy, he does not copy, and in copying enervate, a style made illustrious by some formidable predecessor; his style is an invention of his own, no less natural than original, and in that interval between the imposing groups of the two centuries, the glory that he radiates recalls him alone. After Louis XIV, after that finical elaboration of taste and of sentiments, he revivifies the type that d'Urfé and Mademoiselle de Scudéry had prematurely introduced; and although in his work there is still too much conventionality, prosiness, and chimerical stuff, he often attains, and affords his readers glimpses of, the secret paths of genuine human nature. In the series of painters of the heart and good-humoured moralists, he holds a place from which he could not disappear without leaving a very perceptible void.[1]

[1] The following parallel between Manon Lescaut and Carmen, taken from M. Sainte-Beuve's essay on Mérimée, has seemed to be of sufficient interest to be added here:

"This Carmen is simply a more highly spiced Manon Lescaut, who debauches her Chevalier des Grieux, a man as weak and as easily seduced as Don José, although of an entirely different type. It is interesting to read the two little novels side by side, when one has once thoroughly grasped the identity of the subject in conjunction with the difference in manners and costumes. Abbé Prévost's story has already ceased to be of our time or our civilisation; we can still overlook Manon's lack of heart, but it is hard to forgive the chevalier's degradation, and nothing less than the author's perfect naturalness will avail to lead us on to the true emotion through the debasing scenes through which he conducts us. M. Mérimée has chosen his

course more frankly, or at all events with more deliberation. At the very outset he presents his two characters as rascals; thereafter it is simply a question of degree; it is especially interesting to see how love is born, how it demeans itself, and how it goes to pieces, or persists in spite of everything, in such strong, stern natures, in such untamed hearts. Poor Don José, bewitched by that demon of a Carmen, passes through vicissitudes analogous to those of the Chevalier des Grieux; but the latter's misdeeds are mere peccadilloes compared to the atrocities into which the other is led when he becomes a gypsy bandit. The conclusion differs in this respect: in Abbé Prévost Manon ends by being touched by her chevalier's devotion and by raising herself to his height; whereas Carmen, after a certain moment, feels her fierce passion vanish and no longer loves. However, there is a resemblance even to the end, and Don José, after killing his mistress, buries her in the ravine as piously as Des Grieux buries his in the sand of the desert. A natural consequence of the superabundance of colouring and energy that M. Mérimée has employed in his tortuous study of the brigand and the gypsy, is that the author, like a clever man who knows his constituency, has deemed it advisable to enclose his romance in a setting of pleasantry and sarcasm. He was travelling as an antiquary, his only object being to solve an archæological and geographical problem concerning the battle of Munda, fought by Cæsar against Pompey's sons, when he fell in with the brigand who afterward told him his story; and the romance ends with a short chapter in which the antiquary appears once more, and the philologist disports himself a little on the subject of the language of the gypsies. In Abbé Prévost, on the other hand, everything is ingenuous, and so fluent, so far from seeming displaced, that we wonder to this day, when we observe the narrator's air of kindliness, and his absence of merriment, whether the episode is not authentic, and a simple copy of the truth. M. Mérimée is a consummate artist; Abbé Prévost is not an artist at all, even when he is so unexcelled a painter of nature."

Madame de Lambert,

1647?—1733,

and

Madame Necker,

1739—1794.

Madame de Lambert

and

Madame Necker.

I HAVE long had it in mind to couple together these two clever women, who held salons of so distinctly literary a type, one at the beginning, the other at the close, of the eighteenth century, and to place their profiles in the same medallion. They have in common a pronounced taste for things of the mind, and for common sense heightened by a certain turn of phrase, distinctive, concise, and novel, which one need only be ill-disposed to confound with affectation and preciosity. In both, morality is the dominating element ; decorum and duty regulate manners and tone. Madame de Lambert, amid the debauchery of the Regency, opens under her roof a place of refuge for conversation, for clever badinage, for serious discussions. Fontenelle presides over that refined and polite circle, to which it is an honour to be admitted. Madame Necker, born far from Paris and coming thither from French Switzerland, of which she was the glory, desired nothing so much as to

find in Paris a salon exactly like Madame de Lambert's, —that is to say, one where intellect would be made welcome, and where no sentiment worthy of respect would be outraged. That was the type of salon and the surroundings which would have been best suited to her character. Being obliged, by the much more promiscuous social customs of the period, to do without it, and to open her house to almost everybody who was celebrated in society, for all sorts of reasons, she at all events introduced therein the greatest possible degree of decency and regularity; she made her own selection of the objects of her special admiration and esteem; in her salon Buffon occupied almost the same position that Fontenelle had occupied in Madame de Lambert's. But these similarities, which I do no more than mention, will appear more clearly by a careful study of the two characters.

Nothing, or almost nothing, is known of the first sixty years of Madame de Lambert's life. She died in 1733, at the age, so it was said, of eighty-six, which would fix the date of her birth about 1647. Her name was Anne-Thérèse de Marguenat de Courcelles. Her father, who was a *maître des comptes,* was of Troyes, and Courcelles is the name of a small fief that he owned near that town. She lost her father when she was very young. Madame de Lambert's mother, the daughter of a rich bourgeois

MADAME DE LAMBERT.

From a copper engraving.

of Paris, was an arrant coquette, in whose honour it may be said that her *historiette* is among the most scandalous in Tallemant des Reaux. She was much more engrossed by the Brancases, the Miossens, the Chevalier de Grammont, and all the amiable young noblemen to be found at Court, than by her worthy husband, whose brain was weak, and who even ended by being confined in a single room as a fool. This *historiette* of Tallemant arouses grave suspicions (to say no more) concerning Goodman Courcelles's claims to paternity, and it would not be safe to come too quickly to a conclusion as to the child's father, even if there were more physical resemblance between them.

About that time Bachaumont fell in love with Madame de Courcelles. When her husband was dead, he lived with her several years, then married her. This Bachaumont was the same who was Chapelle's companion in his famous *Voyage;* a man of pleasure and of much wit. He is said to have been very fond of his step-daughter. What the influence of her step-father's circle upon the young woman may have been, we can easily imagine; but we are reduced to guessing. Fontenelle tells us that, at that time, "she often stole away from the amusements suited to her years, to go off and read by herself, and accustomed herself, of her own motion, to make little extracts of what impressed her most. Even then these were either shrewd

reflections on the human heart, or ingenious turns of phrase,—but generally reflections."

To my mind the life of undisguised dissipation led by Madame de Lambert's mother indicates an influence of another sort, which is often seen in such cases, and which may be called influence by contraries. How many times has the sight of a frivolous and disreputable mother driven a judicious and sensible daughter into a class of reflections bordering upon the rigorous and severe! Everything seems to indicate that this was the effect which her mother's evil example produced upon Madame de Lambert. A weak mind would have allowed itself to be led, and would have followed that example; a sensitive and strong mind transformed it into a moral lesson; it revenged itself nobly by well-doing. Madame de Lambert throughout her life made it her duty to respect propriety all the more because she had seen it outraged all about her in her childhood. Worldly esteem and an honourable name — these she made the principal aim and object of her whole conduct.

It seems that she was heir to a considerable estate through her father. Married in 1666 to the Marquis de Lambert, an officer of merit who afterward became a lieutenant-general, as his father had been before him, she entered a social circle more in conformity with her elevated instincts, and she retained nothing of her earlier surroundings except a very ardent inclination for intellectual pursuits.

In her *Avis d'une Mère à son Fils,* which has come down to us, we may see what a lofty conception she had of military renown, and how thoroughly she espoused that religion of loyalty, devotion, and self-sacrifice. "I regret every day," she says to her son, "that I never saw your grandfather. Judging from the praise which I have heard bestowed on him, no one ever had in a greater degree than he the eminent qualities of a soldier and the genius for war. He acquired such esteem and such authority in the army, that he did more with ten thousand men than others did with twenty."

One day, at the siege of Gravelines, Maréchal de Gassion and Maréchal de La Meilleraie, who were in command, had a quarrel, and their enmity went so far as to disrupt the army; their respective troops were on the point of coming to blows when the Marquis de Lambert, then only a major-general, threw himself between the two factions, and in the king's name ordered the troops to halt. "He forbade them to recognise those officers as their commanders. The troops obeyed; the two marshals, La Meilleraie and Gassion, were obliged to withdraw. The king heard of this performance," says Madame de Lambert, "and spoke of it more than once with enthusiasm." It was by such examples that, on entering her new family, she uplifted her own heart, then strove to mould those of her children. After that, all that remained of Bachaumont and of the habits of her early education

tended only to culture and to refinement of mind. Among the words and ideas which come most frequently from her pen when she begins to write, I note especially *morals, innocence,* and *glory.*

Insisting upon this principle of emulation and of noble ardour, she went so far as to say to her son: "You cannot be too eager to rise, or sustain your aspirations with too flattering hopes. Nothing is less becoming in a young man than a certain modesty which causes him to think that he is incapable of great things. This modesty is listlessness of the heart which prevents it from making a start and travelling swiftly toward glory." You imagine that, in the words of that mother, sprung from a wealthy and licentious bourgeoisie, you are listening, in anticipation, to Vauvenargues advising some young friend. Thus it is that energetic souls acquire new vigour under precisely the same circumstances in which others become enervated and corrupted. The excellent M. Droz, in his criticism of Madame de Lambert's writings, is impressed by the dangerous and even absurd tendency of such a scheme of morality, which openly preaches ambition. I beg his pardon, but Madame de Lambert knew that, at the time when she was writing, the peril, for that warlike youth, lay rather in an excess of dissipation and effeminacy. Fénelon, criticising these same *Avis* of Madame de Lambert to her son, said: "Honour, the purest probity, and knowledge of the human heart, are predominant

in this discourse. . . . I might not be altogether in agreement with her as to the full measure of the ambition which she demands of him; but we should very soon be in accord concerning all the virtues whereby she would have that ambition supported and tempered."

Madame de Lambert lost her husband in 1686; two years earlier she had gone with him to Luxembourg, when he was appointed governor of that province, and she had aided him to win the hearts of the people in that newly conquered country. "He had a light hand," she says, "and governed by love alone, never by exerting his authority." She had devoted all of her individual estate, which was considerable, to the advancement of her husband's fortunes, and to maintaining an honourable establishment. When he died she transferred her attention to the interests of her children, grievously jeopardised by tedious and distressing law-suits which she had to carry on against her own family. "There are so few untainted great fortunes," she writes to her son, "that I forgive your ancestors for not leaving you one. I have done what I could to adjust our affairs, in which nothing is left to women but the glory of saving." This regret because of the secondary rôle to which women are reduced will manifest itself more than once in Madame de Lambert. She was adroit enough to win her law-suits, to obtain her property and her children's by conquest, so to speak; and not until then did she give

rein to her inclinations by setting up in Paris an establishment which brought together literary people and people of fashion, and which gradually became one of the best and most prominent houses in the capital, and so continued from about 1710 to 1733, or more than twenty years.

I have told elsewhere how the salons of the seventeenth century, Madame de La Sablière's and Ninon's, came to an end. If one desired to write a formal history of the salons of the eighteenth century, one must begin with Madame de Lambert's. About the same time, but a little later, came Madame de Tencin's; then Madame Geoffrin's and Madame du Deffand's; and so in due course we should arrive at Madame Necker's. But Madame de Lambert unquestionably inaugurates and gives the tone to the new epoch. Some private testimony will enable us to form a pertinent judgment of her salon, almost as if we ourselves had been admitted to it.

"I have just met with a very grievous loss in Madame la Marquise de Lambert, who has died at the age of eighty-six," wrote the Marquis d'Argenson (1733). "Fifteen years ago she did me the honour to invite me to her house, and I became one of her intimate friends. Her house reflected honour upon those who were admitted to it. I went there to dinner regularly on Wednesdays, which was one of her days. In the evening there was always company; we talked, and there was no more thought of cards than at the famous Hôtel de Rambouillet, so extolled by Voiture and Balzac. She was wealthy, made an excellent and benevolent use of her wealth, conferred benefits on her friends, and especially on the unfortunate. A pupil of Bachaumont, she had never had other associates than people of fashion and the brightest minds, and she knew no other passion than a constant, almost Platonic affection."

MADAME NECKER.

From an old copper engraving.

D' Argenson adds that she tried to persuade him to enter the lists for the Académie Française. She assured him of the votes of her friends, who were very numerous in that association. "Some people," he says, "have even tried to cast ridicule upon a most unquestionable fact, namely, that it was difficult for a man to be admitted to the Académie unless he were presented at her house and by her. It is certain that she made fully one-half of our present academicians."

This influence of the salons on the Académie Française, and the importance which that body was beginning to recover, are among the peculiar signs which mark the progress of the eighteenth century. For it is a fact that the Académie Française has not had the same weight at all periods of its existence. It enjoyed great consideration at its creation and in its early days: society and literature, despite an occasional protest here and there, recognised in it the director of the language and of good usage, and even a court of last resort in matters of taste. But thirty years after its foundation, when a youthful and daring literature made its appearance under Louis XIV, when the Boileaus and the Racines, the Molières and the La Fontaines, had really regenerated French letters and poetry, the Académie found itself somewhat behind the times, and it remained so, more or less, during the last thirty-five years of the century. It is customary, in the Académie, to live to a ripe old age; that custom has not been laid aside, and, taken in conjunction with

so many other privileges, it certainly has its value. But the result of this academic longevity was that, in the second half of the seventeenth century, the institution did not take in new blood so rapidly as the public could have wished.

Boileau and La Fontaine waited a long time before they were of the Académie, and even when they were admitted, many of the old school were still members, while there were already slipping in some advocates of a new style, which was not the most pure. Fontenelle was a member betimes; his growing influence, combined with that of La Motte and other friends of Madame de Lambert, helped to impart to the Académie Française something of that philosophic character which was destined to become very perceptible during the eighteenth century, and to make up for the inadequacy thenceforth of its earlier grammatical or purely literary rôle.

But we are talking of Madame de Lambert's salon. When they saw the men of letters so assiduous in their visits to her, and Messieurs de l'Académie dining with her twice a week, her envious detractors did not fail to accuse her of keeping a *bureau d'esprit*. "It was," says Fontenelle, "the only house, with a very few exceptions, which had kept clear of the epidemic of gambling, the only house where people met to converse with one another sensibly, and even wittily, according to circumstances. And so those people who had their reasons for taking it ill that

there should be conversation anywhere discharged ill-humoured remarks against Madame de Lambert's house when they had an opportunity." She was not insensible to such shafts, for she cared for public opinion before everything. I find some of these same animadversions, not from an enemy, but from the pen of a friend, M. de La Rivière, who was Bussy-Rabutin's son-in-law, and who had retired in his old age to the Institution de l'Oratoire. He was a rather clever man, with a facile and somewhat ornate style, but, toward the end, he became most scrupulously religious. In many passages of his *Letters,* he presents Madame de Lambert in a somewhat novel light.

"She was," he says, "my oldest friend and my contemporary. She was born with much intelligence; she cultivated it by persistent reading; but the fairest jewel in her crown was a noble and luminous simplicity, which, at the age of sixty, she thought it best to lay aside."

Elsewhere he says :

"She had a gripe of *bel-esprit.* It was a disease which took her suddenly, and of which she was not cured when she died. She gave herself to the public, she associated herself with Messieurs de l'Académie, and set up at her house a *bureau d'esprit.* I omitted nothing to save her from the ridicule attached to the trade of *bel-esprit,* especially among women; I could not convince her. As I was born with simple tastes, by inclination and perhaps by necessity, I did not choose to appear to be a party to such a false step, and I took leave of her. I was twenty-five years without entering her house, except for a single time when I went to see her to prepare her for her journey to eternity [that is to say, to induce her to confess]. Nevertheless she retained her esteem and affection for me to the end. She came to see me and wrote to me from time to time; my replies were always aimed at her conscience."

It will be observed that religious austerity has much to do with this judgment of M. de La Rivière. One is tempted to wonder whether it really was Madame de Lambert who was suddenly attacked with the disease of *bel-esprit* at sixty years, or whether it was not rather he who was seized with an increase of severity and scruple. However that may be, he is a good man to listen to with respect to her, and he unsuspectingly awards Madame de Lambert high praise when he observes that, notwithstanding all the rather harsh criticisms which he addressed to her, she always retained her friendship and indulgence for him.

This same M. de La Rivière, humble as he has lived to become, is very careful to recall the fact that, when Madame de Lambert was writing her *Avis* to her son, and to her daughter, she was assisted by one of her friends, who was no other than himself. He suggested to her several sentiments and ideas, which she was pleased to transform, he says, into precious stones and *cut diamonds*. But it is precisely this clean, sharp-cut, and original style, which to-day gives distinction and value to these maternal counsels of Madame de Lambert. They are often well conceived, but they are expressed even better.

Her few writings appeared during her lifetime, and originally without her participation, although the extreme care with which she had edited them seems to imply that she had had the public in mind. She had lent her manuscripts to friends, who, according

to custom, were indiscreet. Her *Avis à son Fils* first appeared in 1726, in Père Des Molet's *Mémoires de Littérature,* under the title of *Lettre d'une Dame à son Fils sur la vraie Gloire.* The *Avis à sa Fille* also was about to appear without her sanction, when she decided to publish an edition of both opuscula, in 1728. But it was much worse when the manuscript of her *Réflexions sur les Femmes,* a much more audacious work, and of a nature to arouse the scoffers, fell into the hands of a publisher, and began to circulate among the public at large; she hastily bought up the whole edition, or what was left of it, but was unable to prevent its being reprinted abroad. Thenceforth she had no choice but to make the best of praise and criticism alike, and to become an authoress at her own risk, with all the honours of war.

The *Avis d'une Mère à son Fils,* which is addressed to a young man already fairly started in the career of arms, a colonel of twenty-four years, and which was written, I suppose, about 1701, is marked by great elevation of thought and a piquant turn of phrase. I have said that glory is the goal openly advocated by the moralist, who, herein, is rather ancient than modern, and more in accord with Plutarch than with the gospel. Religion is there defined, for the first time, after the manner of the eighteenth century, and we detect thus early an accent that seems a precursor of Jean-Jacques. "Above all these

duties" [of humanity and citizenship] says the mother to her son, "is the worship which you owe to the *Supreme Being*. Religion is intercourse established between God and man, by God's favour to man, and by man's worship of God. Lofty souls entertain for God sentiments and adoration of a special kind, which does not resemble that of the common herd: everything issues from the heart and goes straight to God." She declaims against the "libertinage" that is fashionable among young men. This word "libertinage," in the language of the seventeenth century, always means the license of the mind in matters of faith, and Madame de Lambert uses it in that sense.

"Most young men of to-day think that they gain distinction by assuming an air of libertinage, which injures them with sensible persons. It is an air which does not imply superiority of the mind, but derangement of the heart.

"One does not attack religion when one has no interest in attacking it. Nothing makes one happier than to have one's mind convinced and one's heart touched: that is a blessing at all times. Even those persons who are not fortunate enough to believe as they ought, bow to established religion; they know that what are called *prejudices* fill a great place in the world, and that they must be respected."

Speaking of her last illness, M. de La Rivière says somewhere, ingenuously enough: "She fell ill; she was eighty-six years old; I was alarmed and I went to see her, to hear her confession. She carried the disease of the mind [*maladie de l'esprit*], to the last extreme, for she chose for her confessor Abbé Couet, who was a man of much wit [*beaucoup d'esprit*], and was known as such." Madame de Lambert, who

did not readily part with her common sense and her reasoning power, even in these religious matters, hit upon some noble words at the end of her treatise *De la Vieillesse*, where she said: "Lastly, things are in repose when they are in their place: *the place of man's heart is the heart of God.* When we are in his hand, and our wills are submissive to his, our anxieties cease. There is no safer refuge for man than the love and fear of God." One could speak no more eloquently, nor think more worthily. In these words the idea of religion is ennobled; it is no longer a mere respectable sentiment, but the loftiest of human proprieties, the end and the limit of our duties. Despite the fine concluding sentence,[1] it is none the less quite clear to us that Madame de Lambert's religion is rather an exalted form of the intellect than an interior spring welling constantly from the heart, or a positive revelation. She speaks of the Supreme Being; she is capable of raising herself to him, or even of resting upon him; but, however that may be, hers is no longer the religion of the seventeenth century, and Fénelon, after reading Madame de Lambert, had need to be more indulgent on this point than Bossuet would have been.

We continue to point out the precursory signs in

[1] A friend calls my attention to the fact that this reflection, which surprised me a little as coming from Madame de Lambert, is in fact simply a quotation, an extract more or less altered in arrangement, from something that she had read. It is found at the end of Marsollier's *Vie de l' Abbé de Rancé.*

her work which indicate the transition to a new epoch. She constantly urges her son to aim high in everything, and at the same time to cling to reality and not to appearances. "Let your intimacies be with persons who are above you; in this way you will accustom yourself to be respectful and courteous. With our equals we grow careless; the mind drowses." This is a keen and true remark. But this superiority, she continues, should not be gauged by rank alone, for there are real and individual grandeurs, and grandeurs by creation. To the latter we owe only *outward respect;* "We owe esteem and *the respect born of sentiment* to merit. When fortune and virtue combined have placed a man in high station, his is a twofold empire, which demands a twofold submission." But how rare this conjunction is! At a distance those who are favoured by fortune inspire awe. "Common report exaggerates their merits, and flattery deifies them. Draw near them and you find mere men. How many common people [*peuple*] we find at Court!" What she says to her son, she will repeat to her daughter. She would have her happy too, she would have her learn to think healthy thoughts, to think differently from common people on what is called morality and happiness in this life. "I call *peuple,*" she adds, "all those whose thoughts are low and vulgar; *the Court is full of them!*"

Those philosophical reflections, which, at a later period, will glide without difficulty into declamation

and intemperance, may be discerned in Madame de Lambert in a state of well-defined analysis. The word "mankind" occurs often in her writings. "Mankind," she says to her son, "suffers because of the extreme distance which fortune has placed between one man and another. Merit is what should separate you from the common people, not dignity nor haughtiness." She repeats it in more than one place. Those who are above him she bids him judge by what they really are, and not by their outward display. "But let us not lose sight of an infinite number of unfortunates who are below us. You owe to chance alone the difference that exists between you and them." She repeats the same counsel to her daughter. "Accustom yourself to be kind and humane to your servants. One of the ancients has said that we should regard them *as unfortunate friends.* Remember that humanity and Christianity make all men equal." Evidently the time draws near when humanity and equality will be preached on all sides: she was one of the first to turn her thoughts to those things, to have a presentiment of them, and to name them, before Louis XIV had vanished.

We find in Madame de Lambert some thoughts which one would think that she had borrowed in anticipation from the moralists who followed her. One would say that she has Vauvenargues in mind, although he did not come until somewhat later, when she says: "I will exhort you much more earnestly,

my son, to work upon your heart than to perfect your mind: the true grandeur of man lies in the heart." On the other hand, if she anticipates her successors on some points, she echoes her predecessors on others, and it would not be difficult to find in her writings some of the thoughts of Pascal, La Bruyère, and La Rochefoucauld, unadulterated. Herein she resembles the old moralist Charron, who is content to combine ideas and express them in fitting words, no matter whence they may come to him, provided that he finds them judicious and to his liking.

In this first of her writings, addressed to her son, we readily distinguish in her and credit her with some vigorous, lofty, and refined qualities—a way of looking at things which implies much discernment and power of analysis, and a way of saying things which is never commonplace. The only fault in these counsels, to one who reads them, is that they allow no repose; the tissue is too compact and always in a state of tension. She herself tells us the secret in speaking to her daughter: "Tell few stories; tell them in a refined and concise style; let what you say be new, or let your turn of phrase be novel." It was this novelty which some well-meaning contemporaries of Madame de Lambert took for neologism, and which caused her to be accused of pretentiousness. As for us, who are less sensitive, and whom these novelties of a century ago barely affect and certainly do not scandalise, we will acknowledge that her style overflows with most

happily chosen words, of a clear and vivid signification.

Her most noticeable failing, in the long run, is the constant affectation of analysis, the fondness for sentences with several members or compartments, which compel the mind to grasp complicated relations. She forces those who read her to work. For example, in one place she defines all the virtues according to the degree in which they are at variance with self-esteem [*amour-propre*]. "All the vices favour self-esteem, and all the virtues agree in combating it: valour *exposes* it, modesty *debases* it, generosity *despoils* it, moderation *disappoints* it, and zeal for the public welfare *immolates* it." This is wonderfully well put; but in Madame de Lambert's time, it did not require a large number of such phrases to fatigue any one who was not endowed at birth with a mind of psychological leanings, and more or less unpractical.

They called that preciosity, and a return to the Hôtel de Rambouillet; one might as truly say that it was in the direction and in the style of Madame Necker's salon. In my eyes Madame de Lambert stands for the mean term between those two salons; she is midway between them and is already turning her eyes in the direction of the more modern one.

The ideas that she expresses concerning the rôle of women and their condition are of a nature now and then to cause surprise, even while they arouse profound esteem for the author. Madame de Lambert,

like Mademoiselle de Scudéry, considers that nothing is so ill-advised as the education commonly given to young women. "Their destiny is to please, and they are given lessons in the art of pleasing only." She, on the contrary, the daughter of such a mother as we have described, realised betimes the need that there is for women to be reasonable beings, and to be armed against their passions. She insists that a woman *must know how to think*. She distrusts the sensitive part of her organisation. "Nothing is more prejudicial to happiness than a sensitive, ardent, and too quickly kindled imagination." Showy virtues do not fall to the lot of women; it seems to distress her a little to observe that fact, as well as "the nothingness, to which," she says, "the men have striven to reduce us." Women must resign themselves, therefore, to practise the modest virtues, and such virtues are difficult, "because glory does not help us to practise them."

The advice that Madame de Lambert gives her daughter is especially noteworthy for its extraordinary comprehension of all the tender and vulnerable points of the sex, and for the extreme dread which leads her to call to her assistance all possible precautions and all possible resources. One would say that this woman, who waited until she was sixty years old before making people talk of her, must have previously put down many inward struggles, many revolts; that she must have fought long and hard. It

was for herself above all, it was to train and inure herself, that she wrote those judicious *Avis,* before transmitting them to her children. It was said in the preface to an English translation of her works, that in what she had written about women she had apologised for herself. She replied proudly: "I have never had occasion to make an apology." It was added that she had revealed a tender and sensitive mind. "I do not deny it," she replied; "it is only a question of being able to make the use of it that I have made."

This use is sufficiently indicated by the *Avis* themselves, so subtly unfolded and so forcibly defined; she exalted her courage, she fortified her reason, she avoided opportunities and risks; she indulged her tastes sparingly, and she put constraint upon her sensibility, in order to make it enduring and of as long duration as the longest life. "When we have a sound and healthy heart," she thought, "we make the best of everthing and everything is transformed into pleasure. . . . . We spoil our taste by amusements; we become so accustomed to intense pleasures that we cannot descend to simple ones. We should dread these great commotions of the mind, which pave the way for ennui and distaste." She says some excellent things on this subject of the moderation and temperance of healthy minds—such things as could have been conceived only by an ardent mind which had partly triumphed over itself.

One fancies that one can detect in more than one of these bits of counsel the beginning of a confession, something like a personal revelation, checked in time.

"Attached to every vagary of the heart there is a pang and a sense of shame which implore you to stop it."

"It is not always our errors that ruin us, but our way of conducting ourselves after we have committed them."

Passion increases with every look backward; to forget is the only sure remedy for love."

And there are a multitude of other thoughts by virtue of which Madame de Lambert deserved to be called the La Bruyère of women. She shares that honour with Madame de Staal de Launay.

I know nothing of Madame de Lambert's face, and they who wrote of her in her old age forgot to mention it. But as she had "a very pretty mother," and a daughter to whom she was able to say, "You were born not without attractions," it is to be believed that she herself was not altogether devoid of charm. Her virtue is the more praiseworthy if that be so.

In the "Reflections" properly so called, which she wrote concerning women, and which are distinct from the *Avis à sa Fille*, she gives herself a somewhat freer rein. She boldly attacks Molière for the ridicule that he cast upon learned women. She shows that, since women have been laughed at for laying claim to intellect, they have substituted de-

bauchery for learning. "When they found themselves assailed for innocent diversions, they argued that, shame for shame, they had better choose that which would pay them better, and they abandoned themselves to pleasure." This little work of Madame de Lambert, in which there is more than one idea worthy to be discussed, must not be separated from the circumstances that inspired it: it was written to avenge her sex and to demand from it an honourable and vigorous employment of the mind in face of the orgies of the Regency. "These are my *débauches d'esprit,*" said Madame de Lambert. At the sight of the Duchesse de Berry, the Regent's daughter, and her gross immoralities, she went back in her imagination to Julie, Duchesse de Montausier.

Madame de Lambert preferred to those shameless women of the Regency even the learned Madame Dacier herself, whom she considered an authority on the subject of the honour of the sex. "She knew how to combine learning and the proprieties of life," she says; "for in these days modesty has been degraded, shame is no longer felt for vice, and women blush for nothing save knowledge." In the dispute that arose between that erudite person and La Motte on the subject of Homer, Madame de Lambert, although she leaned toward the side of her friend La Motte, who was the more courteous and refined, tried to hold the balance and to bring about a reconciliation, which was effected a little later by

the intervention of M. de Valincour. Madame de Lambert would have liked right well to filch from him the credit of that arbitration, and to be able to give to the two adversaries, at her house, that famous dinner of reconciliation of which a witty guest said: "We drank Homer's health, and everything went off well."

When the Duchesse du Maine was in Paris, she frequently attended Madame de Lambert's Tuesdays, and then there was a superabundant expenditure of *bel-esprit,* and a contest of gallant conceits. In the works of La Motte there is a whole volume concerning these society trifles. On ordinary Tuesdays, the conversation at Madame de Lambert's was more serious and more placid, although still very trenchant. The Marquis de Sainte-Aulaire, after the refinements of the little Court of Sceaux,[1] surfeited by the lavish outlay of wit there, sportively exclaimed:

> "Je suis las de l'esprit, il me met en courroux,
> Il me renverse la cervelle;
> Lambert, je viens chercher un asile chez vous
> Entre La Motte et Fontenelle."[2]

A queer position that, to assign to the unartificial, some one may say, and between two strange neigh-

[1] See the essay on the Duchesse du Maine in Vol. I.; especially pp. 44–46.

[2] "I am weary of wit, it rouses my bile,
It turns my brain topsy turvy;
Lambert, I come to take refuge with you,
Between La Motte and Fontenelle."

bours. But everything is relative, and when one is suffocating with heat, a change of a few degrees, on going into another room, immediately produces the effect of the coolest of spring breezes. Let us add, that M. de Sainte-Aulaire was quite at home in Madame de Lambert's salon; for if it is true, as has been said, that "she knew no other passion than a constant and almost Platonic affection," he was its object.

Among the many bright men who frequented her salon—of whom I may mention Mairan, the Abbé de Mongault, the Abbé de Choisy, the Abbé de Bragelonne, Père Buffier, and Président Hénault—Madame de Lambert had chosen a second favourite in the person of M. de Sacy, the elegant translator of the younger Pliny, in whom she found a combination of all the virtues and all the accomplishments, *les mœurs et les grâces*. The society of her other friends was agreeable to her, but that of M. de Sacy was necessary. More than forty years later, d'Alembert, writing in his *Éloges Académiques* that of M. de Sacy, drew a touching picture of the friendship between him and Madame de Lambert, and while drawing it, he recalled to his own mind, by an evident allusion, his liaison with Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, whom he had recently lost.

The literary conclusion concerning Madame de Lambert, that talented person, at once so refined and so right-minded, who made so noble a use of her talents and her fortune, was pronounced long ago by another

friend of hers whom I have already mentioned, the judicious Marquis d'Argenson.

"Her works," he wrote, "contain a complete course in morality most admirably adapted for the use of society and of the present. More or less affectation of preciosity is blended with it; but what noble thoughts, what refined sentiments! How beautifully she speaks of the Duties of Women, of Friendship, of Old Age, of the difference between *Consideration* and *Reputation!* It is a book to be read and reread over and over again."

Thus far I have barely mentioned Madame Necker, inscribed her name by the side of Madame de Lambert's and facing it, to indicate my plan, and to open a perspective. I come now to this second figure, and once more I have to deal with virtue, morality, and veneration of the intellect, in an exemplar more interesting than is commonly supposed.

To form a just estimate of Madame Necker is an undertaking not free from difficulty. Her failings are of those which most readily give offence in France,—they are not French failings; and her good qualities are of those which too frequently are placed second to matters of tact and taste, for they are qualities of the mind and the temperament. It is my desire to deal equitably with both, and to judge that talented person with entire freedom, but always with consideration and with respect. One may judge a public man, dead or alive, with some severity; but it seems to me that a woman, even when dead, provided that she has not ceased to be a woman in all the essential qualities, is always our contemporary to some extent; she is so especially

when she has perpetuated herself to our own day by a posterity of renown, of virtue, and of charm.

In order rightly to appreciate Madame Necker, who in Paris was never aught but a transplanted flower, it is proper to view her in her first bloom and on her natal soil. Madamoiselle Suzanne Curchod was born about 1740, at Crassier in the Pays-de-Vaud, the frontier of France and Switzerland. Her father was pastor, or minister, of the Holy Gospel; her mother, a native of France, had preferred her religion to her country. She was reared and nourished in that country-parsonage life, in which some poets have laid the scene of their most exquisite idylls, and she imbibed there, together with the virtues of the fireside, an inclination for serious studies. She was beautiful, with that pure, virginal beauty which is at its best in early youth. Her long and rather straight face was animated by brilliant colouring, and softened by blue eyes instinct with candour. Her slender figure had as yet only a modest dignity, without stiffness, and without affectation. Such she first appeared to Gibbon during a sojourn that she made at Lausanne. The future historian of the Roman Empire was himself very young at that time; his father had sent him to Lausanne to be educated anew and to be cured of "the errors of popery," into which the young Oxford student had allowed himself to be led. Gibbon passed five years in that agreeable exile, from the age of sixteen to twenty-one. In June, 1757 (he was then twenty), he

first met Mademoiselle Suzanne Curchod, whom the whole town of Lausanne called "La belle Curchod," and who could not appear at a party or at the play without being surrounded by a circle of adorers. Gibbon wrote that evening in his Journal this sentimental and classic note: "I have seen Mlle. Curchod—Omnia vincit Amor, et nos cedamus Amori." In his *Memoirs* he goes into more detail and draws for us a most flattering and most lifelike portrait of Mademoiselle Curchod, as she was at that time.

"Her father," he says, "in the solitude of a lonely village, devoted himself to giving his only daughter a liberal and even a learned education. She surpassed his hopes by her progress in the sciences and languages; and in the brief visits that she paid to some of her friends at Lausanne, Mademoiselle Curchod's wit, beauty, and learning were the subject of universal applause. The tales that I heard of such a prodigy aroused my curiosity: *I saw and I loved.* I found her learned without pedantry, lively in conversation, pure in sentiment, and refined in manners; and that first sudden emotion was only strengthened by the familiarity and observation of a more intimate acquaintance. She allowed me to pay her two or three visits at her father's house. I passed several happy days there, among the mountains of Franche-Comté, and her parents honourably encouraged the intimacy."

Gibbon, who had not yet acquired that grotesque ugliness which afterwards developed, and who already combined "the most brilliant and most diversified intellect with the gentlest and most equable of dispositions," declares that Mademoiselle Curchod allowed herself to be genuinely touched; he himself went so far as to speak of marriage, and it was not until after his return to England that, having met with an ob-

stacle to that union in his father's will, he abandoned it. But the whole affair passed off, so far as Gibbon was concerned, with an equanimity and calmness, even in disappointment, which makes one smile. Seven years later, on his return from Italy, he met Mademoiselle Curchod again in Paris, newly married to M. Necker, and was greeted by her with a mixture of cordiality and pique.

"I do not know, Madame," wrote Madame Necker to one of her Lausanne friends (November, 1765), "whether I have told you that I have seen Gibbon; I was moved beyond all expression by that pleasure,—not that I still retain any inclination for a man, who, in my opinion, hardly deserves it, but my feminine vanity never had a more complete or more honourable triumph. He stayed in Paris two weeks; I had him at my house every day; he had become gentle, yielding, humble, modest even to timidity. A constant witness of my husband's affection, his wit, and his playful humour, and a jealous admirer of opulence, he directed my attention for the first time to that by which I am surrounded; at all events it had never before made any other than an unpleasant impression on me."

Mademoiselle Curchod, then, was, in the year 1758, at the age of eighteen, one of the brightest flowers, one of the marvels of that Pays-de-Vaud which Rousseau was ere long to bring into fashion in the first Parisian society by *La Nouvelle Héloïse.* Rousseau, however, found a way to be unfair to that pleasant province, even while he depicted it as the setting of an earthly Paradise.

"I can honestly say," he wrote in a celebrated passage of the *Confessions,* "'Go to Vevay, visit the country thereabout, sail on the lake, and tell me if

nature did not make that fair land for a Julie, for a Claire, and for a Saint-Preux; but do not seek them there.'" And I will say, and all who have known and dwelt in that province will say with me: "Yes, seek there, if not Julies and Saint-Preux, at all events women of the type of Claire; I mean by that, women with a certain turn of wit, a blending of gravity and gaiety, at once natural and artificial, quite capable of argument, of study, even of dialectics; yet vivacious, rather given to surprises, and by no means devoid of lighter accomplishments and charm."

Mademoiselle Susanne Curchod was, in her blending of qualities, one of those complex yet ingenuous natures, which are far from being unattractive when one meets them amid such surroundings, on the slopes or in the valleys of those terraced green hills which border the Lake of Geneva on the Swiss side.

Voltaire, just returned from Prussia, and before he settled permanently in the suburbs of Geneva, made a trial of this novel sort of life at Lausanne, where he passed the winters of 1756, 1757, and 1758. He was amazed to find there a taste for things of the intellect which he helped to develop, but which he had not to create.

"Among the gossips of Paris," he wrote, "it is commonly supposed that all of Switzerland is a barbarous country; people would be much surprised to see *Zaïre* played at Lausanne much better than it is played in Paris; they would be even more surprised to see two hundred spectators who are as good judges as there are in Europe. I have caused tears to flow from every Swiss eye."

Abate what you please of this praise, make every allowance for courtesy and hospitality, and something will still remain. It was amid these surroundings that Madame Necker, still unmarried, completed her education in the flower of her youth, and became a distinguished figure.

Having lost her venerated father about this time, and being left alone with her mother, who was without means, she aroused the profound interest of all who met her; and as the greatest respect for learning and education prevails in that French-Swiss province, it was suggested that she should give lessons in languages and in those branches of learning which she had studied in the paternal parsonage. She did so with success, with great distinction; she gave lectures, as has always been the custom in Switzerland; she had pupils of both sexes; and a few years ago there could still be seen, in a little valley near Lausanne, the platform or mound of verdure, erected by way of rostrum or throne by the students of the neighbourhood, from which the fair orphan of Crassier awarded praise or prizes, or it may be, on fine days in summer, delivered her lectures in the open air.

During these years Mademoiselle Curchod lost her mother, who had witnessed all her triumphs and had taken joy in them. Thereupon her friends became more than ever troubled concerning the future of that lovely, virtuous, and learned young woman, who was nearly twenty-four years old. It was decided that she

should go to Paris, under the wing of a society woman, Madame de Vermenou, who, happening to pass through Geneva, had seen her and become enamoured of her talents. Madame de Vermenou, who was a widow, was sought in marriage by M. Necker, a banker, already rich, a member of the Compagnie des Indes, and at this time thirty-two years of age; she had not been able to make up her mind to give him a favourable answer. But he had no sooner seen at Madame de Vermenou's house the young lady whom she had brought with her from Switzerland than he realised that his fancy had changed its object, and it was Mademoiselle Curchod who, after a sojourn of a few months at Paris, became Madame Necker, in 1764.

In a series of letters written by Madame Necker to one of her friends in Lausanne, we have a narrative of her thoughts and impressions in the new world in which she was embarked. She has at the outset the feeling of being transplanted and denationalised. Her taste for intellectual things finds satisfaction there, but the cravings of her heart begin to cause her suffering. "How barren of affection this country is!" she cries. When she is better informed she will withdraw that charge, and, a few years later, will say: "Despite my prepossessions, I have found in the heart of Paris people of the purest virtue and capable of the tenderest affection." But this discovery requires more than a day. Her health is impaired at the very beginning;

no one can divine the cause of her indisposition, but it is attributable to homesickness and to the nervous fatigue which will not fail to grow worse with the years, in this novel situation where fortune requires to be purchased by such a multitude of duties and exacting social conventions.

Madame Necker had formed an idea of the authors and clever men and women of Paris solely from books, and she found that the society in which she had to steer her craft was far more diversified, varied, and full of subtle distinctions. "When I arrived in this country," she says, "I thought that letters were the key to everything, that a man cultivated his mind by books alone, and was great only in proportion to his knowledge." But the sort of conversation that coincided with that idea was little in vogue except *en tête-à-tête,* and she very soon discovered her mistake.

"I had not a word to say in company," she adds; "I did not even know the language. Called upon by my sex to fascinate men's minds, I was entirely ignorant of all the different shades of self-esteem, and I offended it when I thought to flatter it. What we used to call frankness in Switzerland became egotism in Paris; negligence in trifles was non-observance of the proprieties here; in a word, for ever out of tune with my surroundings and abashed by my blunders and my ignorance, never able to find the right word, and foreseeing that my present ideas would never harmonise with those that I was obliged to acquire, I have buried my little store so that I may never see it again, and have set to work to earn my living and to save a little if I can."

It is this painful effort which manifests itself in all that Madame Necker has written, and which helped to

undermine her health prematurely. No brain ever worked harder or suffered more than hers.

Placed, within a few months of her arrival in France, at the head of an establishment where she received all those who were most in vogue of Parisian men of letters, eager to prove herself competent and successful in her efforts, a disciple and rival of Madame Geoffrin, she was forced constantly to draw upon herself, upon her health, upon her cherished habits, upon her other tastes.

"I must take this opportunity to make a confession," she wrote in 1771 to a friend in Switzerland; "it is this—that, from the day of my arrival in Paris I have not lived for a single instant on the stock of ideas that I had previously acquired; I except the matter of morals, but I was obliged to make my mind over *entirely new* with respect to the human character, with respect to the circumstances of life, and with respect to conversation."

And, in truth, if we reflect a moment, apart from the excellent Thomas, with whom she became acquainted at the very first, and who met the demands of the serious and somewhat solemn tendencies of her mind; Marmontel, who had the good sense to form a just estimate of her; and, somewhat later, Buffon, who knew enough to appreciate her homage, and who repaid it in admiration,—apart from these, who were the men of letters with whom she had to deal, and whom she was most desirous to entertain regularly and to gather about her?

There was little Abbé Galiani, "who could not forgive her for being virtuous, and for maintaining

the frigid demeanour of modesty." There was Diderot, who wrote to Mademoiselle Voland, in August, 1765: "There is a Madame Necker here, a pretty woman and a *bel-esprit,* who fairly dotes on me; she persecutes me to get me to come to her house. Suard is paying court to her," etc. There was that crowd of *beaux-esprits,* all more or less licentious and irreligious,—Abbé Arnaud, Abbé Raynal, and Abbé Morellet, to whom she applied among the first to start her salon.

"The conversation there was very well," Morellet tells us, "although somewhat constrained by the rigid morality of Madame Necker, in whose presence many subjects could not be mentioned, and who was especially distressed by liberty of opinion in religious matters. But on literary subjects the conversation was very interesting, and she herself talked very well indeed."

We can imagine the constant labour and striving of Madame Necker's faculties in the presence of this entirely unfamiliar society, especially when the circle of her connections widened more and more as M. Necker began his upward course. To enumerate all those whom she received in her salon at Paris or in her park at Saint-Ouen, we should have to give a list of the élite of France.[1]

[1] [Among their friends was the Marquise de Créqui, the alleged author of certain *Mémoires,* the real authorship of which is a mystery. In an essay on Madame de Créqui, Sainte-Beuve says: "She goes there [to the Neckers'] to dine once or twice, but on that head she has a veritable grievance against them which prevents her from going again: they dine at the undue hour of *half-past four;* the Marchioness was accustomed to dine at two."—Tr.]

It has been said that M. Necker made himself noticeable at first in his wife's salon only by his attitude of observation and by a disdainful, or, perhaps, prudent silence upon subjects as to all of which he was not equally well informed. He emerged from this silence only on rare occasions, with some sharp sally, some malicious or joking sentence with which he marked as it passed a blunder or an absurd remark. That serious-minded man had a shrewd and quizzical turn of mind which was peculiar to him, and he proved it afterwards by certain writings which bear witness to a minute and searching observation. Madame du Deffand, that severe and formidable judge, who afterward became intimate with the Neckers, found the husband much to her liking and gave the wife credit for intellect and talent; she said of him, however, that with all his good qualities he lacked a single one, and that the one which makes a man most attractive, "a certain facility which, so to speak, supplies wit to those with whom he is talking; he does not assist one to develop one's thoughts, and one is more stupid with him than when alone or with other people." It would be impossible to define better the effect produced by that type of mind, aloof, exalted, isolated, and unsympathetic,—the *doctrinaire* mind, to call it by its name,—of which M. Necker was the fountain-head among us. Madame Necker, beneath her cold and constrained exterior, loved her husband with lofty passion, with adoration, and he returned her love in

kind. Not by any means the least striking singularity of the period was that altar to honourable and decent wedlock, erected in the heart of Paris and in the centre of the philosophical sect.

"I am very fond of some of our modern philosophers," said Madame Necker, "but I am not fond of their philosophy." In a letter in which she apologises for her inability to introduce to the philosophers two young men from Zürich, she represents them as unable to control themselves in their speech, and as accustomed to work in the morning in their studies and to talk all the rest of the day.

"The morning is devoted to study, and they exercise such entire liberty of thought that they cannot endure to meet a strange face in the houses they frequent; for he who says liberty of thought implies a violent desire to talk. I see some of them, and luckily their morals, which are very respectable, correct the impression produced by their principles; otherwise it would be preferable to renounce the society of such people."

But to renounce it would have cost her too dear; her great merit is that she was able to reconcile her passionate love for intellectual things with perfect integrity of principle amid her perilous surroundings.

Strangely enough, despite their enforced silence on religious subjects, free thinkers like Diderot found themselves even more at ease in Madame Necker's salon than in Madame Geoffrin's. In the latter it was social circumspection, strict observance of the proprieties, which took precedence of everything else; at Madame Necker's it was virtue and an unfailing

amiability, which made itself felt even amid disagreements and reproach.

It was in Madame Necker's salon, and under her inspiration, that the idea of erecting a statue to Voltaire was first suggested, in 1770. He wrote her several entertaining letters and even one or two amorous madrigals on that subject. Pigalle was chosen to execute the patriarch's statue; but when she learned that the sculptor proposed to make him absolutely nude, Madame Necker made a great outcry. Not so had her modesty understood the commission.

In matters of taste, Madame Necker, being not at all sure of herself, and forming her opinion only after reflection, as is usually the case with persons who have passed their youth elsewhere than in Paris, believed, when she came thither, that she had simply to take lessons, as in everything else. "The only advantage of this country," she wrote after living here a year, "is that it trains the taste, but it is at the expense of genius; a sentence is twisted and turned in a thousand ways, and the idea examined from every standpoint." And she thought to acquire taste herself by subjecting her ideas to that species of test, we might almost say of torture. In reality she would have liked, not, as she says, to make herself over entirely new, but to combine two types of intellect, to blend in some way the intellect of her canton with ours. Unluckily the graft with her always continued to be refractory, and her success was very far from perfect.

If one opens the posthumous *Mélanges* of Madame Necker, after laying aside some work of the seventeenth century, one seems to enter an entirely new world, and to have to do with a different language. "She did not try," some one has said, in describing Madame de Caylus's style of writing and her agreeable carelessness. Surely no one will ever say that on reading Madame Necker's collected works. At every turn we meet with comparisons which, far from explaining her thought, often obscure and enigmatical in itself, do but make it still more obscure; the faint gleam that we may have caught a glimpse of vanishes. Some of these comparisons are exceedingly odd. For instance, wishing to describe people who are not equable in disposition or in sensibility, and who scatter themselves about here and there as if they had several distinct minds, she says that "they resemble crabs, one of whose claws may be cut off and the loss be not apparent after two or three days, because they have several centres of feeling." She is fond of mythological similes, and some of them are very far-fetched. Speaking in praise of her husband, and arguing that his life has become indispensable to the public weal, she says: "It is the *brand of Meleager* upon which his ministerial life hangs." [1] This brand of Meleager

[1] [The Parcæ entered the chamber of Althæa, Meleager's mother, and told her that her son would live until the brand then on the fire should be consumed; Meleager having slain Althæa's brothers as a result of a dispute over the carcass of the Calydonian boar, she flew into a rage and thrust the fatal brand into the fire, and Meleager died.—Tr.]

recurs in more than one passage. In a word, we are much too conscious that comparisons, in the works of this clever woman, do not present themselves unbidden, that they are not born under her feet and from the womb of the subject that she is discussing, that they are not suggested by their pertinency at the moment, but that she produces them from some more ancient storehouse, from some notes of conversation where she had them in reserve. So that they cause surprise before all else, and afford no enlightenment.

It would be unjust not to recognise, beside this artificiality, all that is natural in her writings, all that distinguishes her from other women in that age of corruption and sham sensibility. Her sensibility is genuine; it is drawn from the purest moral sources; and when we come to a question of mental elevation, it is both pleasant and profitable to listen to her. Would not one fancy that she was thinking of Madame de Lambert and remembering something of hers that she had read, when she said: "Happy the man who has never found pleasure except in sudden and reasonable impulses! he will be sure of being entertained as long as he lives." She turned her thoughts betimes to the decline of life and to the moment when external charms fade away. Every day adds to her distaste for fashionable society, where everything seems to be artificial, and where her heart finds so little nourishment. She goes back to the past, she loves to live again therein. While she felt at first

all that she lacked in Paris, she nevertheless appreciated that the life there soon becomes indispensable to those who have once tasted it. "It is certain," she writes, "that one may and should be happier elsewhere; but for that to be so one must know nothing of the fascination which, while it does not give happiness, poisons for ever all other kinds of life." When she wrote these words she was still half under the spell (1773).

Her husband's first ministry, which must of course have elated her, was also the moment when she began to lose her illusions.

"My heart and my regrets," she wrote to a friend in July, 1779, "seek constantly a universe where beneficence is the first of virtues. How am I undeceived, concerning ourselves especially! I expected to see the age of gold under so pure an administration; I see only the age of iron; all our aspirations are reduced to doing as little harm as possible."

And so from that moment regret for the past laid hold upon her.

"Regret for the past," she cries, "always turns my glances toward that Being for whom there is no past. I seem to see Him surrounded by all the hours that we have lived, and I seek by his side both the moments and the persons who seem no longer to exist for us; thereupon my heart becomes tranquil, my wandering and despairing thought finds a refuge."

She did not, as so many women do, regret her fleeting youth and fading beauty. One day, however (she was thirty-four years old), she allowed something like a faint lament to escape her:

"I have much difficulty," she wrote to a friend, "in accustoming myself to all sorts of change; age, which seems to come so slowly,

took me by surprise by that selfsame noiseless tread; I fancy that I am in a new world, and I do not know whether the brief instant of my youth was a dream, or whether the dream is just now beginning."

But she soon made the best of it, and the resources of middle age were all in readiness.

"As my tastes in my younger days were vastly different from those which engross me now, I felt but slightly the incommodities of the transition; it came about by slow degrees, and I have never failed to find substitutes for what I have lost. And so, when I look in the glass at my faded complexion and my sunken eyes, and when, on looking into myself, I find a mind more active and more steadfast, then, if it were not that Time has robbed me of the objects of an affection which will end only with my life, I should not know whether I ought to complain of him."

The first ministry of her husband, or, as she said less familiarly, of her *friend,* afforded her an opportunity to develop her virtues and to put them in practice on a grand scale. In 1778 the patients in the hospitals were by no means well treated; it will suffice to say that it was the custom to put more than one in the same bed, and the hospital founded by Madame Necker was originally designed "to demonstrate the possibility of caring for patients *alone in bed,* with all the attention of the most tender-hearted humanity, and without exceeding a fixed price." The experiment was tried in a small hospital of only a hundred and twenty patients. Madame Necker, the foundress, continued to be for ten years the manager and vigilant steward. She deserved to have her share of public praise in a passage of M. Necker's report to the king

in January, 1781. Although worldly malice might find food for ridicule in this formal laudation by a husband of his helpmeet, I must confess that in this case the smile dies on the lips, in view of the loftiness of the object and the magnitude of the benefaction.

I do not propose to follow her in the details of her life and of her various journeys, undertaken for the most part to restore her health, which was impaired by nervous paroxysms indicating the travail of the mind. The duties of her position, the conventions of society, unceasing watchfulness of herself and of her surroundings, a sensitiveness which was coerced and often held in subjection, silently and with intense suffering —all these did their part toward wearing out Madame Necker before her time. Two enthusiastic friendships were predominant in her life next to her worship of her husband. The more exalted of these friendships, which was itself similar to worship, was that which bound her to M. de Buffon. The other was for Thomas, that estimable and moral writer, whom it is the fashion to laugh at to-day, but who was possessed of distinguished literary talents and touching qualities of the heart.

Madame Necker's daughter, who was to be the illustrious Madame de Staël, was already growing up and escaping from her. As lively and impulsive as her mother was self-restrained and cautious, fluttering in all the breezes of the age, and endowed with a genius which was destined to venture upon many

paths, she surprised and disturbed that wise mother, and suggested to her this involuntary thought: "Children ordinarily feel little gratitude for our anxieties in their behalf; they are young twigs that lose patience with the stalk that joins them, unmindful of the fact that they would break if they were detached from it." M. Necker, in the intervals of his serious business, delighted in his daughter's outbreaks and took pleasure in encouraging them. It has been said that Madame Necker was made unhappy by this preference, and that the wife was more vulnerable than the mother was proud.

The events of M. Necker's second ministry left her far behind, and on every occasion when there was any room for hesitation she was with the party that advocated retirement. So that it was some consolation for her, amid so many subjects of distress, to find herself in 1790 at Lausanne or Coppet, in sight of her beautiful lake, and not far from the graves of her parents. During these last years, and while '93 was sowing its crop of horrors in France, she composed a touching work which has found favour even with those who have shown themselves most severe upon Madame Necker's type of intellect,—I mean her *Réflexions sur la Divorce,* which appeared soon after her death. In this work, which she wrote with a hand already failing, Madame Necker proposed to do battle with the French law of divorce and to point out wherein it is opposed to the principal aims of nature

in the organisation of society, and of morality. Strong in her own example, in her own life of virtue and piety, she pleads for the indissolubility of the marriage tie; she cannot conceive how a fundamental institution can be thus left to the mercy of human whims and physical charms. "For the first charm of youth," she says, "is only a first bond which supports two plants newly set side by side, until, having taken root there, they live wholly upon the same substance." Depicting the happiness of a loyal husband and wife, especially that of the father who, seeing that he lives anew in the features of his children, reads therein the chastity of his wife, in the genuineness of her emotion she attains the perfection of expression and colouring:

"Sometimes indeed a dearly loved husband sees all of himself in the features of his children. Nature, who thus becomes the guarantor and interpreter of conjugal love, delights to sanctify with her inimitable brush the chaste passion of a loyal wife; and every glance that a fond father casts upon sons who resemble him, falls with renewed tenderness upon their mother."

These are captivating thoughts, set forth in most natural terms. Side by side with them, to be sure, Madame Necker repeats some of her earlier faults. She carries to excess mythological comparisons, historical illustrations, Meleagers, Arrias, and Pætuses. She most inopportunely cites Henri IV in connection with the picture by Rubens representing the lying-in of Marie de' Medici. Henri IV and Marie de' Medici are unfortunate examples to recall, apropos of marital fidelity. We observe still the same lack of delicacy

of touch in respect to the association of ideas and the relevancy of the nice distinctions in her comparisons. But these failings are more readily redeemed here than elsewhere; the subject inspires her; it is elevated and ingenious; and when she comes to the consideration of marriage late in life, to that final goal of consolation, and sometimes of happiness too, in that disinherited age, her words are noble and strong: "The happiness or unhappiness of old age is often only the essence of our past life." And describing, after the experience of her own heart and after her ideal, the final happiness of a husband and wife,

"Who love ev'n to the last despite th' unwilling years,"

she traces for us the image, and confides to us the secret, of her own destiny; that truly delightful passage should be read from beginning to end.

"A husband and wife who are attached to each other mark the stages of their long life by pledges of virtue and reciprocal fondness; they fortify themselves with the past and make of it a rampart against the attacks of the present. Ah! who could endure to be cast alone upon the unknown shore of old age? Our tastes are changed, our minds are enfeebled, the testimony and the affection of another person are the only proofs that we still exist; sentiment alone teaches us to recognise ourselves; it bids Time relax his sway for a moment. And so, far from regretting the world which shuns us, we shun it in our turn; we escape from selfish projects which no longer appeal to us; our thoughts increase in magnitude like shadows at the approach of night, and a last ray of love, which is now wholly divine, seems to form the transitional stage between the purest sentiments that we are capable of feeling here on earth and those which will inspire us in heaven. Watch, Almighty God, over the friend, the only friend who shall receive our last breath, who shall close our eyes, nor fear to bestow a farewell kiss on lips cold in death!"

I have thought it well to quote at length this curious specimen of a fervid and solemn sort of eloquence,—a most curious specimen, in very truth, if we reflect that it is a product of the last half of the eighteenth century, of that social hierarchy which was already on the verge of dissolution, and that it was written by a person who had lived in the midst of that society thirty years and had not allowed herself to be tainted or infected for a single instant. It was like going back to Philemon and Baucis, but in the only way in which it could be done at that time, namely by means of a certain amount of declamation. It is at all events perfectly sincere; it may readily be mistaken for eloquence, and at the close it is even more than that,—it is a prayer.

Madame Necker had sung her swan's song; she died in May, 1784, in a country house near Lausanne; she was only fifty-four years old. In a *Notice* written by her grandson may be read some affecting details of her last hours. But, even outside her domestic circle, Madame Necker deserves to be remembered in our literature and to hold a more distinguished place therein than has generally been accorded her down to the present time. France owes to her Madame de Staël, and that magnificent gift has made us too prone to forget everything else. Madame Necker, with certain faults which offend at first sight and at which it is easy to arouse a smile, had her own sources of inspiration, and a strongly marked personality. Entering Parisian society with the distinct purpose to be a *femme*

d' esprit, and to join hands with the *beaux esprits* of the time, she was able to preserve her moral conscience, to protest against the false doctrines that were poured upon her from all directions, to preach by her own example, to be loyal to her duties in the centre of fashionable society, and by way of atonement for some too subtle ideas and some affected turns of phrase, to leave behind her more than one monument of her beneficence, a spotless memory, and a few eloquent pages.

As for her daughter, although Madame Necker admired her, she certainly would have liked her to be altogether different, and it is difficult to follow in her career the influence of her mother. But it is much less difficult to trace this influence in some others of her descendants, and Madame Necker's cast of mind, softened and mellowed after the first generation, has surely counted for much in the elevated form of thought, and in the moral principles, always conspicuous, of an illustrious family.

Denis Diderot.

1713–1784.

Denis Diderot.

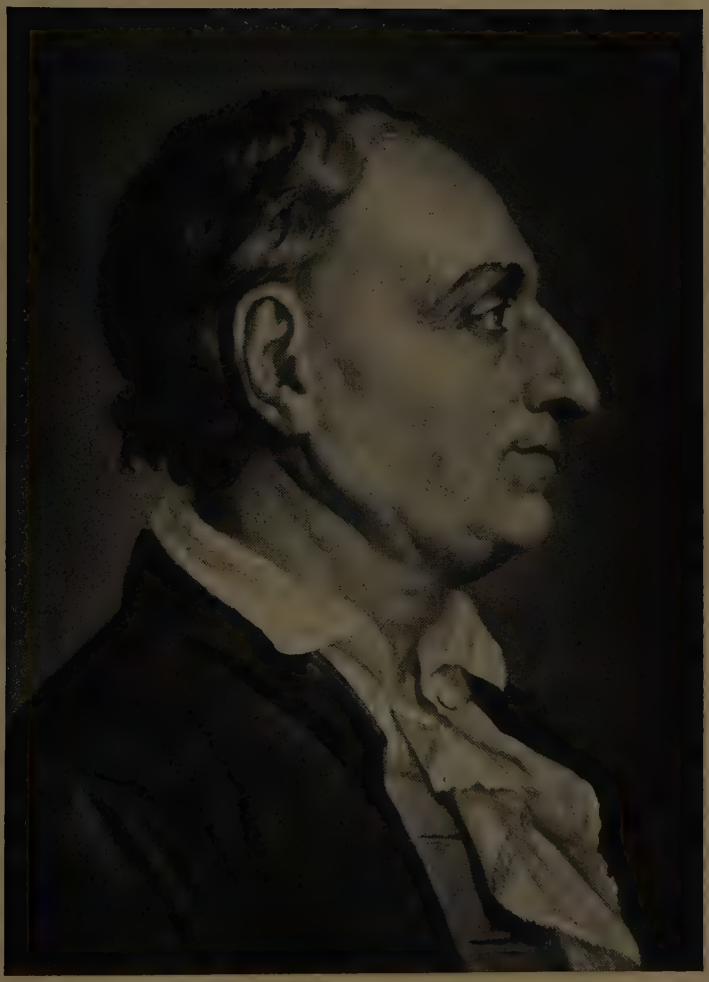
I HAVE always loved the correspondence, the conversation, all the details of the character, the morals, the biography, in a word, of great writers; especially when such a comparative biography does not already exist, prepared by another, and one has to construct and compose it for oneself.

You seclude yourself for a fortnight with the writings of some illustrious dead man—poet or philosopher; you study him, you turn him this way and that, you question him at your leisure; you make him pose for you, so to speak; it is almost as if one passed a fortnight in the country making a portrait or a bust of Byron, Scott, or Goethe; only one is more at ease with one's model, and the *tête-à-tête,* at the same time that it demands a little more attention, imparts much more familiarity. Each feature in turn comes forward and of its own motion takes its place in the countenance you are striving to reproduce; just as one star after another becomes visible and begins to shine in its appointed place in the panorama of a lovely night. With the vague, abstract general type, which alone was

apparent at the first glance, becomes blended and incorporated by degrees a real, well-defined individuality, more and more accentuated, shining with ever-increasing brilliancy; you feel the birth of the likeness and watch its growth; and on the day, the moment, when you have seized the familiar trick, the revelatory smile, the imperceptible blemish, the secret and distressing wrinkle which hides itself in vain under the hair already growing thin,—at that moment analysis vanishes in creation, the portrait speaks and lives, you have found the man.

There is always pleasure in this sort of secret study, and there will always be a place for the works which a keen and sincere enthusiasm may produce as a result of such study. Always, in our opinion, good taste and art will give opportuneness and some lasting quality to the briefest and most specialised works, if, while setting forth but a narrowly restricted portion of nature and of life, they are stamped with that unique seal of the diamond, the imprint of which is recognisable at a glance, which is handed down unchangeable and perfect through the ages, and which one would try in vain to describe or to counterfeit.

Thus much we, as a literary critic, felt that we must say before setting about a careful study of art and a close scrutiny of the great men of the past; it has seemed to us that, despite all that has taken place in the world and all that is still taking place, a portrait of Regnier, of Boileau, of La Fontaine, of André Chenier, of any



DENIS DIDEROT.

From an old painting.

one of those men whose peers are in all ages very rare, would be no more a puerile matter to-day than a year ago; and by turning our attention at this time to Diderot, philosopher and artist, by following him closely in his attractive private life, by watching him speak and listening to his thoughts in his most unreserved moments, we shall at least have gained, in addition to the acquaintance of one more great man, the pleasure of forgetting for a few days the distressing spectacle of the society in which we live, so much poverty and turbulence among the masses, so much ill-defined alarm and such consuming selfishness among the higher classes; governments devoid of ideas and of grandeur; heroic nations sacrificed; the sentiment of patriotism dying out and nothing broader to take its place; religion fallen back into the depths from which it must conquer the world anew, and the future becoming more and more veiled in mist, concealing a shore which does not yet appear.[1]

It was not altogether so in Diderot's time. Then the work of destruction was just beginning to cut to the quick in philosophic and political theory; the task, notwithstanding the difficulties of the moment, seemed quite simple; the obstacles were clearly defined, and the assailants rushed to the assault with admirable concert and with hopes at once boundless and near fulfilment.

[1] [The essay from which this passage is taken was written in 1831. —Tr.]

Diderot, who has been so diversely judged, is, of all the men of the eighteenth century, the one whose personality sums up most completely the philosophic revolt with its broadest and most sharply contrasted characteristics. He paid little attention to politics, which he left to Montesquieu, Jean-Jacques, and Raynal; but in philosophy he was in a sense the soul and the mouthpiece of the century, the guiding theorist *par excellence*. Jean-Jacques was a spiritualist, and at times a sort of Socinian Calvinist; he denied arts, sciences, trade, perfectibility, and in all these directions clashed with his age rather than reflected it. In several respects he stood by himself in that licentious, materialistic society, dazzled by its own brilliancy. D'Alembert was prudent, circumspect, moderate, and frugal in doctrine, weak and timid in temperament, a sceptic in everything except geometry; he had two faces, one for the public, another in private life,—a philosopher of the school of Fontenelle. Buffon did not lack faith in himself and his ideas, but he was not lavish of them, he elaborated them in private and put them forth only at intervals, beneath a pompous style, the grandiloquence of which was, in his eyes, its surpassing merit.

Now, the eighteenth century is justly considered to have been lavish of ideas, familiar in speech, and quick to act, all things to all men, with no aversion for dishabille; and when it got overheated in fervid talk, holding forth in some salon for or against God,—faith!

then it did not hesitate, the dear old century, to remove its wig, like Abbé Galiani, and hang it on the back of a chair. As for Voltaire, that indefatigable bear-leader, whose adroitness in action was so marvellous, and who was in that respect a practical philosopher, he bothered his head very little about constructing, or even adopting the whole of the metaphysical theory of that day; he confined himself to what was most clear, he hastened where the need was most urgent, he aimed at the tallest, wasting none of his shots, and worrying men and gods from afar, like a Parthian with his whistling arrows. In the pitiless vigour of his common sense, he even went so far as to rail lightly at the labours of his epoch, by whose aid chemistry and physiology were seeking to elucidate the mysteries of the human organism.

Thus the philosophical faculty of the age needed, in order to become individualised in a single genius, a brain to conceive more patient and more serious than Voltaire's; it required more abundance, more rapidity of outflow and more solid elevation of thought than could be found in Buffon, more amplitude and glowing resolution than in d'Alembert; a sympathy for the arts, sciences, and trade, which Rousseau had not. Diderot was the man,—Diderot, a rich and fertile nature, open to seeds of all sorts, fertilising them in his breast, and transforming them almost at random by an instinctive and undefined force; a vast, bubbling mould, wherein everything was in a state of fusion,

wherein everything was crushed, wherein everything was in a ferment; a capacity more all-embracing than any other of his time, but active, consuming and vivifying at once, arousing and inflaming everything that came in its way, and sending it forth again in torrents of flame, and of smoke as well; Diderot, passing from a stocking-machine, which he takes apart and describes, to d'Holbach's and Rouelle's crucibles, and Bordeu's *Considérations;* dissecting, if he will, man and his senses as skilfully as Condillac, splitting the slenderest hair without breaking it, then abruptly returning to the bosom of creation, of space, and of nature, and boldly carving from the vast metaphysical geometry some ample fragments, sublime and luminous pages, which Malebranche or Leibnitz might have signed with pride if they had not been Christians[1]; a mind of intelligence, of audacity, and of conjecture, alternating between fact and fancy, wavering between majesty and cynicism, kindly even in its disordered state, and, like his epoch, lacking naught of harmony save a divine ray, a *fiat lux,* a guiding idea, a God.[2]

Such had to be, in the eighteenth century, the man adapted to preside over the philosophic workshop,

[1] *Christians?* The word is more applicable to Malebranche than to Leibnitz.

[2] Grimm compared Diderot's brain to nature as Diderot conceived it: rich, fertile, gentle and wild, simple and majestic, kindly and sublime, but without any predominant principle, without a master, and without God.

the leader of the undesciplined army of thinkers, the man who had the power to organise them as volunteers, to call them together at his pleasure, to urge them on by his effervescent energy in the conspiracy against the still subsisting order of things. Between Voltaire, Buffon, Rousseau, and d'Holbach, between the chemists and the *beaux-esprits,* between the geometricians, the mechanicians, and the men of letters, between these last and the artists, sculptors, and painters, between the partisans of the ancient taste and innovators like Sedaine, Diderot was the connecting link. He it was who best understood them as a body and as individuals, who judged them with the best grace and carried them most considerately in his heart; who, with the least obtrusion of self and of self-sufficiency (*quant-à-soi*), passed most freely from one to another. He was therefore well adapted to be the shifting centre, the pivot of the whirlwind; to lead the line to the assault with inspiration and in unison, and with a something tempestuous and imposing in his bearing. The head erect and slightly bald, vast forehead, the temples bare, the eye aflame or moist with a great tear, the neck bare, and, as he says, "uncovered, the back broad and full," the arms outstretched to the future;[1] a mixture of grandeur and

[1] ["'His high, open, and gracefully rounded brow,' says Meister, 'bore the imposing imprint of a vast, luminous, and fruitful mind.' He adds that Lavater thought that he detected indications of a timid, unenterprising spirit; and there is ground for the statement that, with all his daring intellect, Diderot's springs of conduct and action were

pettiness, of exaggeration and reality, of fiery enthusiasm and human sympathy; such as he was, and not as he was misrepresented by Falconet and Vanloo, I imagine him in the theoretic movement of the century, worthily leading those men who seem to be of his family, those leaders whose ascendancy is unmarred by arrogance, whose heroism is disfigured by impurity, but glorious despite their vices, veritable giants in the *mêlée*, and in reality better than their lives: Mirabeau, Danton, Kléber.

Denis Diderot was born at Langres, in October, 1713; his father was a cutler. For two hundred years that trade had been hereditary in the family, together with the humble virtues, the piety, good sense, and honour of the olden times. Sprung from that sturdy bourgeois stock, but having received from nature a disposition of the most expansive sort, Diderot was the black sheep of the family, and he became its glory.

Being the oldest of the children, Denis was at first intended for the clerical profession, to succeed an

rather weak. By exerting a little adroitness one could do with him whatever one chose; and with all his sudden and quickly kindled impetuosity, he lacked faith in himself. 'The whole profile,' continues the same Meister, 'was distinguished by a manly, sublime beauty; the contour of the upper eyelid was most delicate; the usual expression of his eyes was sweet and sympathetic; but when he began to get heated, they seemed to emit sparks. His mouth expressed an attractive blending of shrewdness, grace, and good-nature.' Such was the man who was wholly himself only when he became animated and excited, which happened so easily."—Sainte-Beuve, in an essay of later date than that from which the passage in the text is taken.—Tr.]

uncle who was a canon. He was sent betimes to the Jesuit school of the town and made rapid progress there. These first years, the home life and his childhood, which he loved to recall, and which he celebrated in several passages in his writings, left a deep imprint upon his impressible nature. In 1760, at Baron d'Holbach's in Grandval, dividing his time between the most fascinating company and the essays on ancient philosophy which he was preparing for the *Encyclopédie,* those incidents of long ago came back to his mind, with tears; in reverie he followed back the course of his *melancholy and tortuous fellow-citizen,* the Marne, which he imagined there, before his eyes, at the foot of the slopes of Chenevières and Champigny; his heart swam in memories, and he wrote to his friend Mademoiselle Voland :

"One of the sweetest moments of my life, and I remember it as if it were yesterday, was when my father saw me coming home from college, my arms full of the prizes I had won, and my shoulders covered with the wreaths which had been awarded me, and which, being too big for my head, had slipped down over it. As soon as he caught sight of me, he left his work, came to the door, and began to weep. It is a touching thing to see a good man and a stern shed tears!"

Madame de Vandeul, Diderot's only daughter, whom he loved so dearly, has left us several anecdotes of her father's childhood, which we will not repeat, but all of which bear witness to the quick susceptibility, the vivacity, and the easy-going kindness of heart of that precocious character. Diderot differs from the

other great men of the eighteenth century in that he had a *family,* an altogether bourgeois family, that he loved them dearly, and that he always clung to them with effusion, heartiness, and joy. When he had become a fashionable philosopher and a famous personage, he still had his dear father, the *forgeron* [blacksmith], as he called him, his brother the abbé, his sister the housekeeper, and his darling little daughter, Angélique; he talked about them all in a charming way; he was not content until he had sent his friend Grimm to Langres to embrace his aged father. I can find little trace of anything of the sort in Jean-Jacques, in d'Alembert (for a good reason),[1] in the Comte de Buffon, or this same M. de Grimm, or in M. Arouet de Voltaire.

The Jesuits tried to attach Diderot to their order; he had a vein of ardent piety; he was tonsured when he was about twelve, and they even tried to take him away from Langres, so that they might dispose of him more at their ease. This little incident induced his father to take him to Paris, where he placed him at the Collège d'Harcourt. Young Diderot showed himself to be a good scholar and above all an excellent comrade. It is said that he and Abbé de Bernis dined more than once at a cabaret, for six sous a head.

[1] [D'Alembert is supposed to have been the son of the famous Madame de Tencin, and to have been left by her at the *Enfans Trouvés*, where he was brought up.—Tr.]

On leaving the college he led, in the Paris of that day (1733–1743), the ordinary life of a young man hard pressed for funds, trying many a trade but unable to decide upon any, accepting work from every hand, reading, studying, devouring everything with avidity, giving lessons in mathematics, which he learned as he went along; walking in the Luxembourg in summer, "in a grey plush redingote, with torn wristbands, and black cotton stockings darned behind with white thread"; going into the shop of Mademoiselle Babuti, the pretty bookseller on Quai des Augustins, (who later became Madam Greuze), with the *quick, ardent, wild manner* which was characteristic of him at that time, and saying to her: "Mademoiselle, La Fontaine's *Contes,* if you please, and a Petronius," and so on. In a word, both before his marriage and after, Diderot continued beyond reason to lead that life of chance, of opportunity, of expedients, of toil, and of constant improvisation. His genius—for he had genius; it is impossible to give any other name to diverse faculties of such breadth and such power—adapted itself to it so perfectly, that one hardly knows to-day whether he would have been suited for any other régime, and one is tempted to believe that by thus distributing himself about and pouring himself forth in all directions and to all comers, he fulfilled his destiny better than he could have done otherwise.

He first entered the office of an attorney, M. Clement de Ris, a compatriot, to study jurisprudence

and the laws, which very soon became a bore. This dislike for the law led to a quarrel with his father, who realised the necessity of curbing, of taming by study, a nature so enthusiastic, and who urged him either to choose some profession or to return to the paternal fireside. But young Diderot was already conscious of his powers, and an irresistible vocation led him away from the beaten paths. He ventured to disobey the indulgent father whom he venerated, and alone, without assistance, at odds with his family (although his mother aided him secretly and at long intervals), living in a garret, still dining for six sous, we find him attempting to construct for himself a life of independence and of study; geometry and Greek aroused his ardour, and he dreamed of the glories of the stage.

Meanwhile every sort of work that presented itself was welcome; the trade of journalist, as we understand it, did not exist at that time, else he would certainly have taken it up. One day a missionary ordered of him six sermons for the Portuguese colonies, and he supplied them. He tried to adjust himself to the post of private tutor to the sons of a rich financier, but that life of dependence became intolerable to him after three months.

It is pleasant to come across the grey plush redingote again in the *Neveu de Rameau*. How bitterly must he, who at a later date so eloquently regretted his "old robe de chambre," have regretted that grey plush redingote, which would have retraced for him

that whole period of youth, of poverty, and trials! How proudly he would have hung it in his study, decorated as that study was with modern luxuriousness! How earnestly and how much more justly he would have exclaimed at sight of that relic, of the sort that he loved so dearly:

"It reminds me of my first trade, and pride halts at the door of my heart. No, my friend, no, I am not corrupted. My door is still open to the need that appeals to me for aid; it finds in me the same amiability; I listen to it, I advise it, I sympathise with it. My heart is not hardened, my head is not exalted; my back is broad and full as of yore. There is the same tone of frankness, the same sensibility; my magnificence is of recent date, and the poison has not yet begun to work."

And what would he not have added, if the everlasting plush redingote had been at hand, precisely the same as when he wore it on that Shrove Tuesday, when, having fallen to the lowest depths of poverty, exhausted by walking, fainting from lack of food, and succoured by the compassion of an inn-keeper's wife, he swore that, so long as he had a sou in his pocket, he would never turn a poor man away, and that he would give his all rather than expose a fellow-creature to a day of such agony!

His morals, amid that life of uncertainty, were not what one might imagine; we learn, from an avowal that he made to Mademoiselle Voland, the aversion which he early conceived for facile and perilous pleasures. This young man, abandoned to his own resources, in dire need, of an ardent temperament, whose pen afterward acquired the reputation of

impurity; who, according to his own testimony, knew his Petronius more than well, and could recite without a blush three-fourths of Catullus's little madrigals, —this young man escaped the corruption of vice, and at the most passionate age succeeded in saving the treasures of his senses and the illusions of his heart. This good fortune he owed to love.

The girl whom he loved was one who had known better days, a poor working-girl, who lived honestly with her mother, by the work of her hands. Diderot became acquainted with her as a neighbour, fell madly in love with her, won her heart, and married her (he was then thirty years old) despite the economic remonstrances of her mother; but the marriage was celebrated secretly, to avoid the opposition of his own family, who were deceived by false reports. Jean-Jacques, in his *Confessions,* expresses himself most contemptuously concerning Diderot's Annette, to whom he much prefers his own Thérèse. Without deciding between these two companions of great men, it seems to be the fact that, although she was a good sort of woman at bottom, Madame Diderot was a busybody, of mediocre intellect and slight education, incapable of understanding her husband or of answering the requirements of his affection. All these unpleasant drawbacks, which time developed, disappeared at the beginning in the glamour of her beauty. Diderot had by her as many as four children, of whom only one, a daughter, lived to grow up. After one of

her first lyings-in, he despatched the mother, and the little one too, no doubt, to his family at Langres, in order to compel a reconciliation. This pathetic expedient was successful, and all the prejudices which had endured for years vanished in twenty-four hours.

But Diderot, crushed by new burdens, forced to toilsome drudgery, translating for booksellers an occasional English book, a History of Greece, or a Dictionary of Medicine, very soon became disenchanted with the woman for whom he had so heavily handicapped his future. Madame de Puisieux (another blunder) during ten years, Mademoiselle Voland, the only one worthy of his choice, during the whole of the second half of his life, and a few such women as Madame de Prunevaux for short periods, engaged him in close liasons which became, as it were, the very tissue of his private life.

Madame de Puisieux was the first: a coquette, and an impecunious one, she added to Diderot's burdens, and it was for her that he translated the Essay on Merit and Virtue, and wrote the *Pensées Philosophiques,* the *Interprétation de la Nature,* the *Lettre sur les Aveugles* and *Bijoux Indiscrets,* a better assorted and less serious offering. Madame Diderot, neglected by her husband, became more confirmed in her by no means refined tastes; she had her coterie, her little circle of intimates, and Diderot thenceforth acknowledged no other domestic tie than the education of his daughter.

After such an experience one can readily understand

how it was that that one of the philosophers of the age who best appreciated family morality, who performed most religiously the duties of father, son, and brother, had at the same time such a slender conception of the sanctity of marriage, which is, however, the keystone of all the rest. One can readily see by what personal feeling he was inspired when he made the Otaheitan say in the *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville:*

"Can you imagine anything more absurd than a command which forbids the change that is born in us, which enjoins a constancy that cannot exist, and which destroys the liberty of the male and the female by binding them together for ever; than a fidelity which confines the most fickle of pleasures to a single individual; than an oath of immutability between two creatures of flesh and blood, beneath a sky which is not the same for two successive instants, in caverns which threaten destruction, at the base of a cliff that is crumbling away, at the foot of a tree that is falling apart, on a rock that moves and totters?"

It was Diderot's strange destiny, albeit easily explained by his ingenuous and contagious exaltation of mind, to have felt or inspired during his life sentiments so disproportionate to the real merit of the persons concerned. His first, his most violent, passion bound him for ever to a woman who had no real sympathy with him. His most violent friendship, which was as passionate as love, had for its object Grimm, a refined, keen, agreeable intellect, but a hard and selfish heart.[1] And lastly, the most violent ad-

[1] This is too severe a judgment of Grimm; I have since formed a more favourable opinion of him, on studying him at close range. [The relations between Diderot and Grimm are discussed more fully in the essay on the latter.—Tr.]

miration that he inspired came from Naigeon—Naigeon, the idolatrous worshipper of his philosopher, as Brossette was of his poet; a sort of addle-pated disciple, a fanatical beadle of atheism. Wife, friend, disciple—thus Diderot went astray in his choice of all three; La Fontaine could have been no more unlucky than he. However, except as to his wife, it seems that he himself never realised his mistakes.

Every man endowed with great talents, if he has come into the world at a time when they can make themselves known, owes to his epoch and to mankind a work suited to the general needs of that epoch, a work which will assist the march of progress. Whatever his private inclinations, his caprices, his slothful humour, or his fancy for incidental writings, he owes to society a public monument, on pain of disregarding his mission and squandering his destiny. Montesquieu by the *Esprit des Lois,* Rousseau by *Émile* and the *Contrat Social,* Buffon by the *Histoire Naturelle,* Voltaire by the grand total of his labours, bore witness to this sanctified law of genius, by virtue whereof it devotes itself to the advancement of mankind; nor did Diderot, whatever may once have been said too thoughtlessly, fail to do his part.[1]

His great work, his own special work, so to speak, was the *Encyclopédie.* As soon as the booksellers who first conceived the idea of it had laid their hands

[1] This is a partial retractation, a correction of what I had previously written in an article in the *Globe.*

on him, they were confident that they had their man; the idea instantly expanded, took on body and life. Diderot seized upon it so eagerly and presented it in such an attractive light that he succeeded in winning the approbation of the pious Chancellor d'Aguesseau, and in inducing him to give his assent, his patronage, to the undertaking; d'Aguesseau was its earliest patron.[1]

It was originally intended to be nothing more than a translation, revised and augmented, of Chalmers's English Dictionary—a bookseller's speculation. Diderot fertilised the original idea and boldly conceived the scheme of a universal compendium of human knowledge in his day. He took twenty-five years (1748–1772) to carry it out. He was the living corner-stone within of this collective structure, and also the target of all the persecution, of all the threats from without. D'Alembert, who had joined him mainly from self-interest, and whose ingenious Preface assumed far too much, for the benefit of those who read only prefaces, of the surpassing glory of the whole undertaking, deserted when it was half executed, leaving Diderot to contend against the frenzy of the pietists, the cowardice of the booksellers, and to struggle beneath an enormous increase of editorial labour.

[1] [Elsewhere Saint-Beuve quotes M. de Malesherbes to this effect: "Chancellor d'Aguesseau was advised of the project [of the *Encyclopédie*]; he not only approved it, but he revised and improved it, and *chose M. Diderot for the principal editor.*" Malesherbes was censor at the time.—Tr.]

The history of philosophy, which he treats at second hand, it is true; the description of the mechanic arts, in which perhaps he displays more originality; three or four thousand plates which he caused to be drawn under his own eye; in a word, the responsibility and superintendence of the whole affair were never able to engross him or to quench the sparkle of his energy. Thanks to his prodigious activity, to the universality of his knowledge, to the manifold adaptability which he acquired at an early age, in poverty,—thanks above all to his moral power to rally his associates about him, to inspire and arouse them, he completed that daring edifice, threatening in its massiveness, yet built according to rule. If we seek the name of the architect, his is the name that we must read upon it.

Diderot knew better than any one else the defects in his work; he even exaggerated them to himself, considering the time spent upon it; and believing that he was born for the arts, for geometry, for the stage, he deplored over and over again that he had wasted his life over a matter the profit of which was so paltry and the glory so promiscuous. That he was admirably constituted for geometry and the arts, I do not deny; but surely, things being as they then were, a great revolution, as he himself observed,[1] being under way in the sciences, which were descending from the higher geometry and from metaphysical contempla-

[1] *Interprétation de la Nature.*

tion, to include in their scope morality, belles-lettres, natural history, experimental physics, and trade; furthermore, art in the eighteenth century being falsely turned aside from its more elevated aim, and debased to serve as a philosophical speaking-trumpet, or as a weapon in the conflict;—amid such general conditions, it was difficult for Diderot to employ his powerful talents more profitably, more worthily, and more memorably than by devoting them to the *Encyclopédie*. He aided and hastened, by that civilising work, the revolution that he had noted in the sciences.

Diderot, in his first *Pensées Philosophiques*, seems especially indignant at the tyrannical and waywardly savage aspect which the doctrine of Nicole, Arnauld, and Pascal gave to the Christian God; and it is in the name of misjudged humanity and of a saintly commiseration for his fellow-men that he begins the daring criticism in which his impetuous fervour will not allow him to stop. So it is with the majority of unbelieving innovators: at the starting-point the same protestation of a noble purpose makes them one.

The *Encyclopédie*, then, was not a peace-bringing monument, a silent cloistral tower, with scholars and thinkers of every variety distributed among the different floors. It was not a pyramid of granite with an immovable base; it had no feature of those pure and harmonious structures of art which ascend slowly during centuries of fervent devotion toward an adored and blessed God. It has been compared to the im-

pious Babel; I see in it rather one of those towers of war, one of those siege-machines, enormous, gigantic, wonderful to behold, such as Polybius describes, such as Tasso imagines. There are ruinous portions, and unsymmetrical, much plaster, and firmly cemented and indestructible fragments. The foundations do not extend into the ground; the structure wavers, it is tottering, it will fall; but what does it matter? To apply here an eloquent observation of Diderot himself: "The statue of the architect will remain standing amid the ruins, and the stone that is detached from the mountain will not shatter it, because its feet are not of clay."

Diderot's atheism, although he flaunts it at intervals with a deplorable flourish of trumpets, and although his adversaries have too pitilessly taken him at his word, can generally be reduced to the denial of an unkind and vindictive God. In truth, it often seems that all that he lacks is a ray of light to illuminate everything; and one might well say of Diderot's atheism, as he himself said of those two landscapes of Vernet, in which everything is darkened and obscured by the coming of night: "Let us wait till to-morrow when the sun will have risen."

If the *Encyclopédie* was Diderot's great social work and his principal work, his principal glory in our eyes to-day is the having been the creator of earnest, impassioned, eloquent criticism; it is by his work in this direction that he survives and that he must be

ever dear to us all, journalists and extemporaneous writers on all subjects. Let us salute in him our father and the earliest model of the race of critics.

Before Diderot, criticism in France had been exact, inquisitive, and shrewd with Bayle, refined and exquisite with Fénelon, straightforward and useful with Rollin; I omit in modesty the Frérons and Des Fontaines. But nowhere had it been lively, fruitful, searching,—if I may so express it, it had not found its soul. Diderot was the first who gave it a soul. Naturally inclined to overlook defects and to take fire at good qualities,

"I am more affected," he said, "by the attractions of virtue than by the deformities of vice; I turn gently away from the wicked and *I fly to meet the good.* If there is in a literary work, in a character, in a picture, in a statue, a beautiful spot, that is where my eyes rest; I see only that, I remember only that, all the rest is well-nigh forgotten. What becomes of me when the whole work is beautiful!"

This propensity to extend a cordial welcome, to universal condescension and to enthusiasm, doubtless had its risks. It has been said of him that he was singularly fortunate in two respects, "in that he had never fallen in with a bad man or a poor book." For if the book were poor, he made it over and unconsciously attributed to the author some of his, Diderot's, own inventions. Like the alchemist, he found gold in the crucible because he had put it there. However, it is to him that is due the honour of having first introduced among us the fruitful criticism of *beauties,* which he

substituted for the criticism of *faults;* and in this respect Chateaubriand himself, in that part of the *Génie du Christianisme* where he eloquently discusses literary criticism, simply follows the path blazed out by Diderot.

Abbé Arnaud said to him: "You have the reverse of dramatic talent: it should transform itself into all the characters, and you transform them all into yourself." But if it be true that Diderot was nothing less than a dramatic poet, that he was in no wise competent for that species of sovereign creation and of transformation altogether impersonal, he had by way of compensation, and in the very highest degree, that power of *semi*-metamorphosis which is the game and the triumph of criticism, and which consists in putting oneself in the author's place and at the point of view of the subject that one is examining, in reading every written work *according to the mind that dictated it.* He excelled in taking to himself for a time, and at his pleasure, the mind of another person; in gathering inspiration from it, often to better effect than that other himself had done; in arousing the enthusiasm not only of his own brain, but of his heart; and at such times he was the great modern journalist, the Homer of the profession, intelligent, ardent, effusive, eloquent, never at home, always abroad; or if it happened that he received others at his home and amid his own ideas, then he was the most open-hearted, the most hospitable of mortals, the most friendly to all

men and to everything, and gave to all his circle, readers no less than authors or artists, not a lesson but a fête.

Such an one does he appear in his admirable *Salons de Peinture.* One day Grimm, who supplied several sovereigns of the North with the latest news of literature and the fine arts, asked Diderot to write for him a report on the Salon of 1761. Diderot had theretofore turned his attention to many subjects, but never to the fine arts in particular. At his friend's request he undertook to observe and scrutinise for the first time what he had never up to that time done more than casually glance at; and the result of his observations and reflections gave birth to those pages of admirable *causerie* which really created criticism of the fine arts in France.

I am aware of one objection which is commonly made to such noble discourses upon art, and to which Diderot's *Salons* are peculiarly obnoxious. It is that they are *beside* the subject, that they discuss it from the literary, the dramatic standpoint, which is the standpoint dear to the French. Madame Necker wrote to Diderot: "I continue to be infinitely entertained by reading your *Salon; I do not care for painting except in poetry;* and that is how you have had the skill to interpret all the works, even the most commonplace, of our modern painters." That is praise indeed, and, according to some people of intelligence, it is the severest kind of criticism.

"It is a fact," they say, "that it is a peculiarity of the French to judge everything with the mind, even forms and colours. It is true, that, as there is no language to express the delicate refinements of form or the various effects of colour, whenever one undertakes to discuss them, one is forced, for lack of power to express what one feels, to describe other sensations which can be understood by everybody."

Diderot is more open than others to this reproach, and the pictures which he sees are generally simply a pretext and a motive for those which he makes of them, and which he imagines. His articles almost invariably consist of two parts: in the first, he describes the picture that he has before his eyes; in the second, he suggests his own. Such talkative writers, however, when they are, as he was, saturated with their subject, imbued with a lively appreciation of art and of the things which they are discussing, are at the same time useful and interesting: they guide you, they make you pay attention; and while you follow them, while you listen to them, while you go along with them or take another road, the sense of form and colour, if you have such a sense, awakens, takes shape, and becomes sharpened; unconsciously you become in your turn a good judge, a connoisseur, for mysterious reasons which you cannot describe and which there are no words to express.

To how great a degree Diderot is a *littérateur* in his way of criticising pictures, we may discover at the very outset. A painter has represented "Telemachus on Calypso's Island": the scene shows them at table, where the young hero is narrating his advent-

ures, and Calypso offers him a peach. Diderot considers that this offering a peach by Calypso is an *absurdity,* and that Telemachus has much more sense than the nymph or the painter, for he continues the tale of his adventures without accepting the proffered fruit. But if the peach were gracefully offered, if the light fell upon it in a certain way, if the nymph's expression were consistent with her act, if, in a word, the picture were a Titian or a Veronese, that peach might have been a chef-d'œuvre, despite the *absurdity* which the mind thinks that it detects therein; for in a picture, the narrative of adventures, which we do not hear, and which the offer of the peach runs the risk of interrupting, is only secondary; we have no use for our ears, we are all eyes.

In a great number of instances, however, Diderot has some just observations, strikingly true, which he offers less as a critic than as a painter. For example, addressing M. Vien, who has painted a Psyche holding her lamp in her hand and surprising Cupid in his sleep, he says:

"Oh! how little sense our painters have! how little they know nature! Psyche's head should be bent over Cupid, the rest of her body thrown back, as it is when we creep toward a place we are afraid to enter and from which we are all ready to fly; one foot resting on the ground, the other barely touching it. And that lamp—ought she to let the light fall on Cupid's eyes? Should she not rather hold it away and interpose her hand so as to shield the light? Besides, that would be an excuse for arranging the light in the picture in a very fetching way. These fellows do not know that the eyelids are transparent in some sort; they have never seen a mother come at night

to look at her child in the cradle, with a lamp in her hand, and afraid of waking him."

In all this Diderot is a great critic, and in that kind of general criticism which no art can possibly escape on the pretext of technique.

"It seems to me," he says, "that when one takes up the brush, one should have some powerful, ingenious, delicate, or interesting idea, and should have in mind some definite effect, some impression to be produced. . . . There are very few artists who have ideas, and there is hardly a single one who can dispense with them. . . . There is no middle way—either interesting ideas, an original subject, or wonderful workmanship."

This wonderful workmanship, which is, after all, the condition without which the idea itself cannot live; this exceptional and superior execution which is the hall-mark of every great artist—when Diderot detects it in one of them, he is the first to feel it and to interpret it for us by words no less wonderful,—unusual words from a wholly new vocabulary of which he is, as it were, the inventor. And, in general, all the powers of improvisation, of picturesque and quick imagination, with which he was endowed; all his stores of bold, profound, and ingenious conceptions; the love of nature, of the country, and of family; even his sensuality, his decided tendency to touch and describe forms; the sentiment of colour, *the sentiment of the flesh,* of blood and of life, "which is the despair of colourists" and which came to him as his pen flew—all these priceless qualities of Diderot

found employment in those *feuilles volantes* which are still his surest title to the admiration of posterity.

He surpasses himself whenever he speaks of Vernet and of Greuze. As an artist, Greuze is Diderot's ideal; he is a sincere, sympathetic painter, a painter of the family and the drama, affecting and straightforward, slightly sensual, yet moral at the same time. And so, when Diderot falls in with him, he makes fast to him, translates him, interprets him, explains him, adds to his meaning, and never again releases his hold of him. "I am a trifle long, perhaps," he says, "but if you knew how I am enjoying myself while boring you! I am like all the other bores in the world." The analyses, or rather the *paintings,* which Diderot has given us of the "Village Bride," the "Girl Weeping for her Dead Bird," the "Beloved Mother," and the rest, are masterpieces, little poems appropriate to the pictures and printed on the opposite page as it were. Diderot frequently says of a painter, "He paints freely (*large*), he draws freely." The same may be said of himself as a critic; he spreads his colours freely; his criticism is effusive. Even when describing to us with keen delight some family idyl of Greuze, he finds a way to mingle some tones of his own. In his analysis of the "Girl Weeping," he does more, he introduces a complete elegy of his own invention. That child, who seems to be weeping for her bird, has her secret, she is weeping for something very different.

"Oh! what a lovely hand," cries the intoxicated critic as he gazes at her; "what a lovely hand! what lovely arms! Observe the accuracy of the detail of those fingers, and those dimples, and that soft flesh, and the reddish tint of the finger tips caused by the pressure of the head, and the fascination of it all. One would draw near to that hand to kiss it, were it not that one respects the child and her grief."

And, even while enjoining upon himself respect for the child's grief, he does draw near; he begins to speak to her, to raise, as gently as he can, the veil of mystery:

"Why, my dear, your grief is very great, very profound. What means this dreamy, melancholy expression? What! all for a bird? You are not weeping, you are in deep affliction; and your affliction is accompanied by thought. Come, my dear, open your heart to me; tell me the truth: is it really this bird's death that has withdrawn you so entirely and so sadly into yourself?"

And so he goes on and transfixes the idyl with his elegy. Thus the picture is, with him, simply a pretext for reverie, for poetic thoughts.

Diderot is the king and the god of those half-poets who become and appear whole poets in criticism; all that they need is an external fulcrum and a stimulus. Observe that, in analysing this picture, and others of Greuze's works as well, Diderot delights in noting therein, or in introducing, a faint vein of sensuality amid the moral meaning—a vein which is really there, perhaps, but which at all events he loves to trace out, to point his finger at, and which he is tempted to magnify and exaggerate rather than pass over. The curves of the breast, the fulness of contour, even in the family pictures, even in wives and mothers, he

recurs to again and again, he delights to let his glance and his pen rest upon them, not as a critic or an artist, not as a fastidious libertine either (Diderot is not depraved), but as a natural, materialistic man, and sometimes a little indelicate. That is a weak side in him, a vulgar and even rather ignoble side. This excellent man, sincere, exalted, warm-hearted, this critic so animated, so ingenious, so keen, who has above all else a mania for preaching *morality,* is utterly unable, in presence of an object of art, to content himself with elevating and determining our idea of the beautiful, or even with satisfying our sensitiveness to impressions; he does more, he disturbs our senses a little. And so when you see at times on his brow a reflection of the Platonic ray, do not trust to it; look closely, there is always a satyr's foot.

We have divers fugitive writings of Diderot, brief narratives, tales, skits, which it is the fashion to call chefs-d'œuvre. A chef-d'œuvre! there is always more or less courtesy in the use of this word with respect to Diderot. The chef-d'œuvre properly so-called, the finished, definitive, complete work, in which good taste sets the measure of the movement and sentiment, is not his forte: the superior quality, always scattered about in his work, is nowhere concentrated, nowhere set in a frame and glowing with a steady radiance. He is, as we have seen, much more truly *the man of the sketch.*

In the short pieces written for a purpose, such as

the *Éloge de Richardson* or the *Régrets sur ma Vieille Robe de Chambre,* he has much grace of expression, happy thoughts, original conceits; but the emphatic manner recurs and manifests itself in spots, the apostrophe spoils the naturalness for me. There are gusts of emphasis here and there. In this direction he lays himself open to caricature to some extent, and that fact has been made use of without compunction in the portraits, generally overcharged, which have been drawn of him. Diderot is altogether successful, and without art too, when he makes no preparation, and has no particular object in view, when his thoughts escape him, when the printer is at his elbow, waiting for him and hurrying him; or when it is time for the postman to come, and he writes in haste, on a tavern table, a letter to his friend. It is in his *Correspondance* with that friend, Mademoiselle Voland, and in his *Salons,* written for Grimm, that we find his most delightful pages, the outspoken, rapid sketches in which he lives again just as he was.

Diderot set forth his views on the substance, the cause, and the origin of things in the *Interprétation de la Nature,* under the shelter of Baumann, who was no other than Maupertuis; and even more explicitly in the *Entretien avec d'Alembert* and the strange *Rêve* (Dream) which he attributes to that philosopher. It is sufficient for our purpose to say that his materialism is no dry geometrical mechanism, but a confused vitalism, fruitful and potent, a spontaneous, unceasing,

evolutionary fermentation, wherein, even in the least atom, delicacy of feeling, latent or patent, is always present. His opinions were those of Bordeu and the physiologists, the same that Cabanis afterward expressed so eloquently. From the way in which Diderot appreciated external nature, *natural* nature so to speak, which the experiments of scientists had not as yet distorted and falsified—the woods, the streams, the charm of the fields, the harmonious beauty of the sky, and the impression that they make on the heart—he must have been profoundly religious by nature, for no man was ever more sympathetic and more accessible to universal life. But this life of nature and of created beings he purposely left undefined, vague, and in some sort diffused about him, hidden in the heart of the seeds, circulating in the air-currents, fluttering over the tree-tops, breathing in the puffs of wind; he did not gather it about a central point, he did not idealise it in the radiant example of a watchful, guiding Providence. However, in a work which he wrote in his old age, a few years before his death, the *Essai sur la Vie de Sénèque,* he gratified himself by translating the following passage from a letter to Lucilius, which filled him with admiration:

"If there is before your eyes a vast forest, peopled by ancient trees, whose tops ascend to the clouds and whose interlacing branches conceal the heavens from you, that immeasurable height, that profound silence, those masses of shadow which the distance makes more dense and unbroken,—do not all these signs *hint* to you the presence of a God?"

It was Diderot who underlined the word *hint* (*intimer*).

I am delighted to find in the same work a criticism of La Mettrie which indicates in Diderot some slight forgetfulness perhaps of his own cynical and philosophical extravagances, but also a bitter distaste for and a formal disavowal of immoral and corrupting materialism. I like to have him reprove La Mettrie for not having *the first idea of the true fundamentals of morality,* "of that enormous tree whose head touches the heavens and whose roots reach down to hell, in which everything is bound together, in which modesty, reserve, courtesy, the most trivial virtues, if such there be, are attached as the leaf is to the twig, which one dishonours by stripping it."

This reminds me of a dispute concerning virtue that he had one day with Helvetius and Saurin; he writes to Mademoiselle Voland a charming description of it, which is a picture in a few words of the inconsequence of the age. Those gentlemen denied the innate moral sense, the essential and unselfish motive of virtue, for which Diderot argued.

"The amusing part of it," he adds, "is that the discussion was hardly at an end before those excellent folk began unconsciously to use the strongest arguments in favour of the sentiment they had been combating, and to furnish the refutation of their own opinions. But Socrates, in my place, would have extorted it from them."

He says in one place, referring to Grimm: "The severity of our friend's principles is thrown away; he

distinguishes two sorts of morality, one for the use of sovereigns." All these excellent ideas concerning virtue, morality, and nature recurred to his mind with greater force than ever, doubtless, in the meditative seclusion, the solitude which he tried to arrange for himself during the painful years of his old age. Several of his friends were dead; he often felt the loss of Mademoiselle Voland and Grimm. To conversation, which had become fatiguing, he preferred his dressing-gown and his library on the fifth floor, under the eaves, at the corner of Rue Taranne and Rue de Saint-Benoît; he read constantly, meditated much, and took the keenest pleasure in superintending his daughter's education.

In his old age Diderot wondered whether he had made a good use of his life,—whether he had not squandered it. Reading Seneca's treatise *De Brevitate Vitæ,* especially the third chapter, where the reader is appealed to so earnestly: "Come, review your days and your years, call them to account! Tell us how much time you have allowed to be stolen from you by a creditor, by a mistress, by a patron, by a client. How many people have pillaged your life, when you did not even dream what you were losing!" Diderot, thus reminded to search his conscience, wrote as his only comment: "I have never read this chapter without blushing; *it is my history.*" Many years earlier he had said to himself: "I am not conscious of having as yet made use of half of my powers;

up to this time I have only fiddle-faddled." He might have said the same thing when he died. But, as an antidote, an alleviation of these ill-concealed regrets of the writer and the artist, the philosopher and the moralist in him rejoined: "My life is not stolen from me, I give it voluntarily; and what better could I do than bestow a portion of it upon him who esteems me enough to solicit that gift?" It was in precisely the same frame of mind that he wrote somewhere or other these kindly and admirable words:

"A pleasure which is for myself alone touches me but little and lasts but a short time. It is for myself and my friends that I read, that I reflect, that I write, that I meditate, that I listen, that I observe, that I feel. In their absence my devotion refers everything to them. I think unceasingly of their happiness. If a beautiful line impresses me, they know it at once. If I have fallen in with a fine drawing, I promise myself to tell them about it. If I have before my eyes some entrancing spectacle, I unconsciously think how I shall describe it to them. I have consecrated to them the use of all my senses and all my faculties, and that perhaps is the reason that everything is exaggerated, everything is glorified a little in my imagination and in my language; sometimes they reprove me for it, the ingrates!"

We, who are of his friends, of those of whom he thought vaguely at a distance, and for whom he wrote, we will not be ungrateful. While regretting that we find too often in his writings that touch of exaggeration which he himself admits, a lack of discretion and sobriety, some laxity of morals and of language, and some sins against good taste, we do homage to his kindness of heart, his sympathetic nature, his generous intellect, his shrewdness and breadth of view and

of treatment, his freedom and delicacy of touch, and the admirable vigour, the secret of which he never lost throughout his incessant toil. To all of us Diderot is a man whom it is encouraging to observe and to study. He is the first great writer in point of time who definitely belongs to modern democratic society. He points out to us the road and the example to follow: to be or not to be of the *Académie,*[1] but to write for the public, to address the whole people, to be always in haste, to go straight to the reality, to the fact, even when one has a mania for reverie, to give, give, give, with no purpose ever to take back; *to wear oneself out rather than rest,* is his motto. And that is what he did to the very end, with energy, with devotion, with a sometimes painful consciousness of this constant loss of substance. And yet, through it all, and without a too manifest effort to that end, he succeeded in saving, of all these scattered fragments, some enduring ones, and he teaches us how one may make his way to the future and to posterity, and arrive there, though it be only as débris from the shipwreck of each day.

Diderot's beneficent life, replete with good counsels and good works, must have been a source of the

[1] [Diderot was never a member of the Académie Française. In an essay on Duclos, Sainte-Beuve quotes a letter (1760) of Voltaire to Duclos, in which the latter (then Secrétaire Perpetuel of the Académie) is urged to use his influence with Madame de Pompadour to obtain Diderot's election, on the pretext that his assistance would be of great value in compiling the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie*.—Tr.]

greatest inward consolation to him; and yet, perhaps, at certain times, there came to his lips this saying of his old father: "My son, my son, an excellent pillow is that of reason; but I find that my head rests even more softly on that of religion and the laws."

He died in 1784.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

1712–1778.

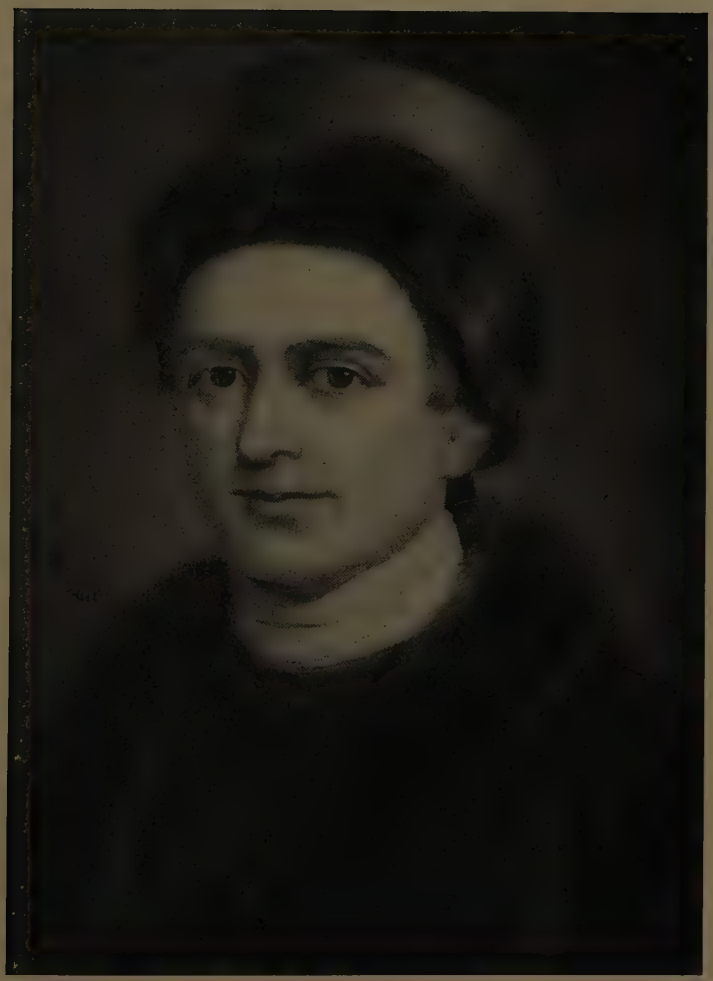
Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

IN 1803 there was published for the first time the correspondence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau with a contemporary of his, a woman of intellect, and one of his enthusiastic admirers, Madame de La Tour-Franqueville. This correspondence, into which Rousseau entered against his will, and in which, from the first day to the last, every letter was extorted from him, as it were, is nevertheless noteworthy and interesting in that it is connected, that it forms a complete whole, that it was not intended for the public eye, and that it shows us Jean-Jacques *au naturel,* from the morrow of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* down to the time when his mind became hopelessly impaired. In it we can study, in an abridged form, the increasing progress of his oddities and his moods, interspersed with delightful lapses, and with rare but charming gleams of his former self. In it we can study at the same time the public of that day, and, if I may use the phrase, *Rousseau's women,* in the person of one of the most distinguished and certainly the most devoted of them all.

Every great poet, every great novelist has his procession of admirers, especially women, who surround him, who exalt him to the skies, who adore him,

who would gladly sacrifice themselves for him, and who (I humbly beg their forgiveness), if they were allowed to have their way, would, unwittingly, soon have him torn in pieces like Orpheus. But it is in that circle of admirers, where everything is reëchoed again and again, and exaggerated, that it is sometimes convenient and interesting to observe an author and to study him. Tell me who admires you and I will tell you what manner of man you are—at least with respect to the form of your talent and your tastes.

We have had in our day many instances of these diverse processions, which we have watched as they passed by. But it was Rousseau who inaugurated this great revolution in France, and who definitively brought women into the game. He stirred up in his own interest that moiety of the human race, theretofore self-restrained and not indiscreet; the enthusiasm of the sex for him was unprecedented. How shall we describe that universal revolt which broke out after *La Nouvelle Héloïse,* after *Émile* (1759–1762), which anticipated the Revolution of '89, and which, at a long distance, paved the way for it? Madame de Staël, Madame Roland—will not they soon appear in the front rank of those whom I call Jean-Jacques's women? More modest, or less in the public eye, but no less generous and devoted, Madame de La Tour-Franqueville was one of the first: she opens the procession, and she deserves to be assigned a place by herself in the renown of him to whom she consecrated



JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU.

From a painting.

herself, for he, ingrate that he is, does not say a word of her in his *Confessions*.

It was two years after *La Nouvelle Héloïse* appeared, and while it still had public sentiment ablaze and was playing havoc with excitable imaginations. Rousseau, forty-nine years of age, living in retirement at Montmorency, was enjoying that last interval of repose (a sorely perturbed repose) before the publication of *Émile*, which was to revolutionise his life. Late in September, 1761, he received a letter, unsigned, in which the writer said to him: "You must know that Julie is not dead, and that she lives to love you; this Julie is not myself; you will see that from my style; I am at most her cousin, or rather her friend, even as Claire was." It was a friend of Madame de La Tour who thus assumed the rôle of Claire, and who betrayed to Jean-Jacques his latest admirer, herself worthy to be admired. After a somewhat tedious eulogy of this unknown Julie and of her right to enter into relations with the great man, she told Rousseau how he might reply. He did reply, and on this first occasion by return mail, without waiting to be urged.

No matter how great a misanthrope and bear one may be, one is always susceptible to such alluring advances of a new and at the same time mysterious admiration. But, in this first letter, he takes his precautions and depicts himself thus early, with his strange variations of moods: "I trust, madame, despite

the beginning of your letter, that you are not an author, that you have never had an idea of being one, and that it is not a battle of wits to which you propose to challenge me—that being a kind of fencing for which I have no less aversion than incapacity." Thereupon he enters seriously into this prolonged game of Claire, Julie, and Saint-Preux; he makes no pretence, as good taste would require a well-bred writer to do, of treating lightly the personages of his invention; he continues to show them respect, and to speak of them to his correspondent as if they were real exemplars. "To the editor of one Julie you make known the existence of another, who really exists, and whose Claire you are. I am overjoyed for your sex, and indeed for my own; for, whatever your friend may say, as soon as there are Julies and Claires, there will be no lack of Saint-Preux; tell her so, I entreat you, so that she may be on her guard." Then he suddenly takes fire at the idea of finding somewhere a replica of the inseparable friends of whom he has dreamed; the apostrophe, that figure of speech which is his favourite literary trick, breaks forth. "Charming friends!" he cries, "if you are such as my heart imagines you, may you, for the honour of your sex and the happiness of your lives, never find a Saint-Preux! But if you are like other women, may you find none but Saint-Preux!"[1]

[1] [Bernardin de Saint-Pierre once asked Jean-Jacques if Saint-Preux were not himself. "No," was the reply, "he is not altogether what I was, but what I would have liked to be."—Tr.]

All this, read in cold blood to-day, by men of a generation which has never felt the same enthusiasm, seems a little peculiar and provokes a smile. On his recovery from this romantic outburst, Rousseau goes into the realties of life more than was necessary, exhibiting to those two young women, whom he did not know, all the details of his physical ills, his infirmities. "You speak of making my acquaintance; you are, doubtless, unaware that the man to whom you write, afflicted by a cruel and incurable disease, struggles every day of his life between pain and death, and that the very letter that he is writing to you is often interrupted by diversions of a very different sort." When we know what sort of disease Rousseau's was, we are slightly surprised at this direct allusion to it. Montaigne, to be sure, speaks of a similar malady that he had, but he speaks of it to his readers, that is to say, to everybody; whereas in this case Rousseau mentions it in a private letter to two young women to whom he is writing for the first time; that is going a little beyond Montaigne!

Madame de La Tour was a person of merit and of virtue. Married to a man far from worthy of her, from whom she finally separated by the advice and with the consent of her family, she did not misuse her ill-fortune to the point of thinking that she had the right to console herself. She has one fault, however, in common with all the women of this school of Rousseau: she speaks not alone of her sensibility and

her charms, but of her character, of her *principles,* her *morals,* and her *virtue.* I do not know whether the women of the seventeenth century had more or less of all those things; but as a general rule they did not talk about them themselves; and that is more agreeable, more becoming, in fact, whether because it is better not to call attention to what one lacks, or because there is good taste and good grace in allowing others to discover what one has.

Madame de La Tour's enthusiasm for Jean-Jacques is not artificial, it is sincere, and yet there is something false in it, as there is in its object and hero himself. She works herself up and raves about the purity of her passion, about the beauty of the motive which actuates her. She would fain make of the aging and infirm misanthrope a genuine Saint-Preux, an ideal Saint-Preux, all soul and all mind, all flame. The instinct of her sex, that is to say, her common sense, whispers to her now and then, it is true, that she has little to expect from him, that she can with difficulty extort a reply from him, that it is hardly becoming, after all, for a woman to throw herself thus at the head of a surly fellow (great writer though he be), who troubles himself not at all about her and who spurns her. Then suddenly, ignoring the disadvantages, she cries: "*He is a man!* What difference does it make? Ought the paltry distinction between the sexes to be considered in a commerce of which the soul pays all the expenses?" There is the false note, there the

impossible begins. Why, it is sex and nothing else (do you not realise it?) which, constantly brought to the surface, or understood, vaguely hinted at, and felt, makes the charm of such correspondences, even the purest, from which you anticipate nothing else than that selfsame charm.

Madame de La Tour's friend, the *soi-disant* Claire, who had begun the correspondence in her friend's name, was the first and only one to abandon it. She became disgusted with Rousseau's gusts of temper, which were in truth severe on certain days, especially when the two friends demanded letters, answers, which they did too often. One day, when he had been harassed and reproached by the two friends for the infrequency and brevity of his replies, Rousseau, annoyed beyond endurance, wrote the following letter to Madame de La Tour:

"Montmorency, 11 January, 1762.

"Saint-Preux was thirty years old, in good health, and intent only upon his pleasures; nobody resembles Saint-Preux less than J.-J. Rousseau. On receipt of a letter like the last, Julie would have been less offended by my silence than alarmed at my condition; at such a time she would not have amused herself by counting letters and underlining words; nobody resembles Julie less than Madame de —— [La Tour]. You have much wit, Madame, you are very glad to display it, and all that you want of me is letters: you are more representative of your quarter than I thought.

"J.-J. Rousseau."

Observe that Madame de La Tour lived on Rue Richelieu, in the Palais-Royal quarter, and that Rousseau's closing allusion was nothing less than a vulgar

insult. Madame de La Tour's friend, "Claire," had had enough. "I have given myself three smart blows on the breast," she wrote to her friend, "because I was fool enough to bring you two together. Socrates said that he looked at himself when he wanted to see a madman. Let us give that receipt to our animal." In the last letter that she had written to Rousseau, this Claire, who had perhaps more wit, or at all events a less reserved and sharper wit than Madame de La Tour, had discharged at the eloquent bear the most cruel phrase that he could hear. "Bah!" she had said, "you are made just like other men." Molière's Dorine could have thought of nothing better.

In truth, Rousseau's great pretension, the germ of his malady and of that of his successors, was precisely this, that he was not cast in the mould of other men. "I am not made like any man that I have ever seen; I venture to believe that I am not made like any man alive." These words of Rousseau, at the beginning of his *Confessions,* all those who are afflicted with Rousseau's disorder say or think.

Madame de La Tour did not follow her friend Claire's example; she did not lose courage. It was not her brain alone that had become enthusiastic for Rousseau: she loved him sincerely, ardently, irrationally, with the devoted passion of a woman who had never before had an object upon which to place her romantic affections. A few sentences from him, in his early letters to her, sentences wholly literary, the

significance of which she exaggerated and which she read again and again, had led her to think that she had succeeded in occupying for an instant some corner in his heart, which was open to nobody since Madame d'Houdetot had passed that way. She resumed the correspondence alone, unknown to Claire; she became—what a woman becomes so easily when she loves—importunate, persistent, often maladroit; she was a torment. Constantly humiliated, she returned again and again to the charge, never disheartened. Proud and sensitive, she received many a wound, which, however, never prevented her from forgiving.

The name "Julie," which Rousseau had bestowed upon her at first, was taken from her; he called her nothing but "Marianne."[1] She submitted to this painful diminution of evidences of regard, already so rare and so dearly bought, and continued to show gratitude for what she did obtain. Sometimes he forgot even the name Marianne, and did not know what to call her when he wrote to her; she had to refresh his memory. No matter, she still found means to grasp at the slightest marks of affection, and to be moved by things that certainly were not worth the trouble.

The interval of two or three years, during which

[1] [Marianne was the heroine of the inordinately long (11 volumes) novel of that name published by Marivaux in 1738–1741, to which, rather than to that author's plays, is said to be due the coining of the word *marivaudage,* which means great subtlety and refinement of expression.—Tr.]

Rousseau, having taken refuge in Switzerland, lived at Motiers (1762–1765), was the time when the correspondence was most regular and afforded most consolation to poor Marianne. One day, after receiving from her a letter in which she drew a pleasing portrait of herself, Rousseau wrote to her: "How delightful it will be to me to hear all the pleasant things you write, said to me by such a lovely mouth, and to read in those deep blue eyes, fortified by black lashes, the friendship which you express for me!"

That was the supreme moment. "Do you know that your letter is charming," Madame de La Tour replies, "and that, in order not to deem you too charming yourself, I have been obliged to remember the many clouds with which you have darkened the beautiful days that you have sometimes given to me? If it were more equal, my intercourse with you would be too absorbing; such as it is, it absorbs me enough to give me both pleasure and pain; more would be too much."

Let us be just: there are moments when we understand Rousseau's annoyance, when we almost share it; for Madame de La Tour is very exacting, although she seems not to suspect it. One day she sends him another portrait of herself, this time a miniature. She attaches to this gift an importance perfectly natural in a woman, in a woman who loves, who would fain be loved by a man who has never seen her; but that feeling betrays itself by over-much solicitude. She in-

sists that Rousseau *at the very moment* that he receives the portrait, or the letter accompanying it (and even though he does not send his answer for a week), shall sit down to write—what?—his first impression of her. She wishes to seize this first impression all a-quiver, when it has made but one leap from the heart and mind to the paper. Rousseau obeys, but in few words, and too coldly to suit the sensitive Marianne: "So here it is at last, the portrait that I have so justly longed for! It comes just when I am surrounded by strangers and tiresome visitors. I thought that I ought to notify you of its receipt, and to set your mind at rest about it." Poor Marianne is in despair and frantic to receive so little. "Your laconicism distresses me, my friend." She would like to know what he thinks of her in the portrait; she is at great pains to inform him that it does not flatter her; that everybody thinks that she is better-looking than it makes her. In a word, she is a woman. Alas! all this rests upon an illusion, upon the theory that because she loves she must be loved equally. Madame de La Tour did not know that, since Madame d'Houdetot's day, Rousseau's heart had no more flame to give forth. And so, despite all her efforts, she can find no lodging in that contracted and embittered heart.

She strives to insinuate a soothing quality, a secret consolation into that glorious passion of hers; that would have been difficult, doubtless, at any time, but it certainly was too late at the time when she made

the attempt. Rousseau tells her so in every tone; he enumerates his physical ills, the persecutions of which he is, or believes himself to be, the object, the bores, the spies, and Heaven knows what else!

"And with all the rest," he adds, sensibly enough, "a man who has n't a farthing of income cannot live on air, and he must be at some pains to provide himself with bread. But I am amused at my simplicity, in trying to make a Parisian woman listen to reason concerning a situation so different from her own—a woman who is an idler by profession, and who, having no other occupation than to write and receive letters, thinks that her friends should pay no heed to anything else."—"I know," he says again, with no less truth than bitterness, "I know that it is not in the human heart to put itself in the place of other people in respect to its demands upon them."

At this time Rousseau's reason was already seriously impaired; he was beginning, not only to appear mad in the vague general sense of the word, but actually to be mad, in the exact, medical sense. His correspondence with Madame de La Tour during his sojourn in Switzerland bears traces of the irritation, the over-excitation of *vanity*, in other words, of that trait which, in madness of this sort, is at once the cause and the symptom. "You say that I am not indifferent to anybody," he wrote one day to Madame de La Tour; "so much the better! I cannot endure lukewarm people, and I much prefer to be hated to the death by a thousand and to be loved in the same way by a single one. *Whoever is not passionately fond of me is unworthy of me.*" Then the diseased chord begins to vibrate. He can contain himself no

longer; the spring is released. "A person may not care for my books," he adds, "I have no fault to find with that; but *whoever does not love me because of my books is a knave;* no one can ever drive that out of my mind!" His mind, therefore, was already attacked. One has a sense of humiliation for what is called human talent or genius, when one reflects that it was after this time that Rousseau wrote some of his divinest pages, the first books of the *Confessions,* the fifth "Promenade" of the *Reveries.* That wounded organism seemed in only the better trim to produce some of its most delicious fruits.

Induced by the persecution to which he was subjected in Switzerland to go to England and entrust himself to the hospitality of David Hume, Rousseau returned for a moment to Paris (December, 1765). A *Life of Hume* has recently[1] been published in Edinburgh, which places this episode of Rousseau's life in its proper light. In this connection Hume's letters are invaluable, impartial testimony. The cold temperament of the English sage was at that time outspoken in favour of him who proposed to be his guest. To no purpose did the *philosophes* inform him that Rousseau would be at odds with him before he reached Calais. Hume would not believe a word of it, he had found him so mild, so courteous, so modest, so naturally vivacious, and of so pleasant a humour in conversation.

[1] [Written in 1850—Tr.]

"He has," he said, "more of the manners of a man of the world than any of the literary men here, except M. de Buffon, whose air, carriage, and attitude correspond more nearly to those of a Marshal of France than to one's idea of a *philosophe*. M. Rousseau is of small stature and would be rather ugly were it not that he has the finest features in the world, or at all events the most expressive."

Hume called him "the pretty little man"; he did not even see over-much affectation in the Armenian costume which Rousseau wore at that time on the pretext that his infirmity made it necessary. But this same David Hume judged him most justly when, a month or two later, and before their falling-out, finding that Rousseau was determined to shut himself up, alone, in the country, he prophesied that he would be as unhappy there as he was anywhere else.

"He will be absolutely without occupation," he wrote to Blair, "without society, and almost without diversion of any sort. He has read very little during his life, and he has now renounced reading altogether. He has seen very little, and he has not the slightest curiosity to see and observe. He has studied and reflected, strictly speaking, very little, and has, in truth, only a very slight stock of knowledge. He has simply *felt* throughout his life; and in that regard his sensitiveness has reached a point that surpasses anything I ever saw before; but it affords him a keener sensation of pain than of pleasure. He is like a naked man, not only stripped of his clothes, but stripped of his skin, who, thus flayed to the quick, should be forced to contend with the inclemency of the elements which incessantly keep this world in turmoil."

Certainly it is impossible to describe more exactly Rousseau's condition, mental and physiological; and with a guest of such unhealthy susceptibilities, thus abandoned to solitude, "without occupation, without books, without society [except that of the wretched

Thérèse [1]], and *without sleep,''* Hume must have been the less surprised at the result.

Meanwhile I have forgotten Madame de La Tour, and Rousseau himself came within an ace of forgetting her when he passed through Paris. She waited anxiously for him to advise her of his arrival by a word,—perhaps she even expected a visit from him. "I heard that you were in Paris, my dear Jean-Jacques; I cannot believe it, as I did not learn it from yourself." But "Dear Jean-Jacques" was not in an amiable mood that day. "I have received your two letters, Madame; more reproaches! As I never, in whatever situation I may be, receive anything else from you, I take them for granted and know what to expect. My arrival and my stay here are not a secret, I have not been to see you, because I go to see no one." And he made her, who deemed herself already an old friend, feel that she was only a new friend, one among a multitude, and that she had not as yet succeeded in gaining a real foothold in a corner of his heart.

She made bold, in spite of everything, to present herself at his door, in the Temple, where the Prince de Conti was giving him shelter. She arrived at an hour when she hoped to find him alone, but he was not; she went in, however, and it would seem, from the gratitude which she displayed, that she was not too

[1] [Thérèse La Vasseur, the woman with whom Rousseau lived for many years; he had five children by her, whom he carried, one after another, to the Foundling Hospital.—Tr.]

coolly received: he embraced her when she went away. This was the only occasion when she met the object of her worship, with any satisfaction to herself. Six years later (April, 1772), when Jean-Jacques had returned to Paris, she appeared one morning at his lodgings on Rue Plâtrière, on the pretext that she had music for him to copy.[1] She did not give her name, and he did not recognise her. She went again two months later and made herself known. She had little success; he gave her her dismissal by letter, and hinted that that third visit was quite enough. A prey to his mania, Rousseau no longer belonged to himself.

And yet Madame de La Tour deserved well of him on a memorable occasion, and he himself had seemed to appreciate her devotion. When, six months after Rousseau went to England, his quarrel with Hume burst out and all Paris took sides for or against him, Madame de La Tour did not hesitate: she was for Jean-Jacques, *whether or no;* it is a woman's right, and her honour, to act blindly in such a case. She published, anonymously, a letter most favourable to her friend's disposition, although she knew so well how unjust and insulting he could be without reason. This letter, which has lost all its interest to-day, bears witness to a fearless pen, capable of virile polemical writing,—the lance of an amazon. "As I read it," wrote Rousseau, "my heart beats fast, and I recognise

[1] [It was by copying music that Jean-Jacques gained a livelihood during his last years —Tr.]

my dear Marianne." But this gratitude soon subsided; his heart was already too closely beset by distrust to admit for long any gentle sentiment.

Let us be more just than he was. It was her aspiration to make a place for herself in his heart and to leave an impression there, and she failed; but at least let her name be attached to the renown of the man who so often spurned her, and to whom she devoted herself without a murmur; may it be given to her (it is the sole consolation that she would have wished) to live forever, as a satellite in the radiance of his glory!

Turning now to the consideration of Rousseau from a literary standpoint, I should like to say a few words concerning the French language of the eighteenth century—the language which was in part bequeathed to that century by the dying seventeenth—as we find it in that writer through whose influence it made the greatest progress, and who compelled it to submit to the greatest revolution it had known since the days of Pascal—a revolution from which we of the nineteenth century date our beginnings.

Before Rousseau and after Fénelon there were many attempts at acquiring styles of writing which were no longer pure seventeenth-century: Fontenelle had his style, if style there ever was; Montesquieu had his,—more robust, more solid, more striking, but a style none the less. Voltaire alone had none, and his quick, clear, impetuous language flowed as if its

source were but two steps away. "You think," he writes somewhere, "that I express myself clearly enough; I am like the little brooks,—they are transparent because they are not deep." He said this laughingly; in such wise we tell ourselves many half-truths. But the age demanded something more; it wished to be moved, excited, rejuvenated by the expression of ideas and feelings of which it had no clear conception, and which it was always seeking. Buffon's prose, in the early volumes of the *Histoire Naturelle,* gave it a sort of image of what it wanted, an image more majestic than living, a little out of reach, and too closely attached to scientific subjects. Rousseau appeared: on the day when he really became known to himself, he revealed at the same instant to his epoch the writer best adapted to set forth with novelty, with force, with a logic streaked with flame, the confused ideas which were struggling, striving to be born. In taking possession of this language, which he had had to vanquish and make himself master of, he put a little constraint upon it, he marked it with a ply which it was destined to retain thenceforth; but he gave it more than he took from it, and, in many respects, he strengthened and regenerated it. Since Jean-Jacques it has been the form of the language created and firmly established by him into which our greatest writers have cast their innovations, and which they have striven to improve. The pure seventeenth-century form, as we love to recall it, has been little

more than a charming relic of antiquity, and a source of regret to persons of taste.

Although the *Confessions* did not appear until after Rousseau's death, and when his influence was already in the plenitude of its power, it is in that work that it is most convenient for us to-day to study him, with all the merits, the prodigies, and the defects of his talent. We will try to do it, confining ourselves so far as we can to a consideration of the writer, but reserving the right to comment upon the ideas and the character of the man.

The present moment [1850] is not very favourable to Rousseau, who is charged with being the author, the promoter, of many of the ills that we are undergoing. "There is no writer," some one has judiciously said, "better fitted to make the poor man arrogant." In spite of all this, we will try not to be unduly influenced ourselves by this personal feeling, so to speak, which leads men of good judgment to blame him for the painful trials through which we are passing. Men who have such a range and such foresight should not be judged according to the emotions and reactions of a single day.

The idea of writing "Confessions" seems so natural in Rousseau, and so in harmony with his disposition and his talent alike, that one would hardly believe that it was necessary to suggest it to him. It came to him, however, in the first place, from his publisher, Rey of Amsterdam, and also from Duclos. After *La*

Nouvelle Héloïse, after *Émile,* Rousseau began in 1764 to set down his *Confessions,* at the age of fifty-two, after his departure from Montmorency and during his sojourn at Motiers in Switzerland. There has just been published, in the last number of the *Revue Suisse* (October, 1850), an opening chapter of the *Confessions,* taken from a manuscript deposited in the library of Neuchâtel; it is Rousseau's first draft, which he afterward suppressed. This original exordium, which is much less emphatic and less ornate than that which we find in the *Confessions* as published, does not greet us with a blast from "the trumpet of the last judgment," nor does it end with the famous apostrophe to the "Eternal Being." Rousseau sets forth therein, at much greater length, but in philosophical language, his plan of painting himself, and making his confessions *à toute rigueur;* he makes it very clear in what the originality and singularity of his plan consists.

"No one can describe a man's life but the man himself. His inward being, his real life, is known to him alone; but when writing of it, he disguises it; under the name of his life, he writes his apology; he exhibits himself as he wishes himself to be seen, but not at all as he is. The most sincere of men are, at the best, truthful only in what they say; they lie by their reticences, and those things as to which they are silent put such a different face on what they pretend to confess, that by telling only a part of the truth they tell nothing. I put Montaigne at the head of those *sincere hypocrites,* who try to deceive by telling the truth. He exhibits himself with failings; but he ascribes to himself only those which are amiable; *there is no man living who has not some hateful ones.* Montaigne's portrait of himself is a good likeness, but taken in profile. Who can say that a scar on the

cheek, or an eye gouged out on the side that he hides from us, would not have changed his aspect completely?"

He proposes therefore to do what no one before him has ever planned or dared to do. As for style, it seems to him necessary to invent one as novel as his project, and proportioned to the diversity and dissimilarity of the things he has it in mind to describe.

"If I attempt to produce a work written with great care, as others have done, I shall not paint myself but besmear myself with paint.[1] The matter now in hand is my portrait, not a book. I am going to work, so to speak, in the *camera obscura;* no other art is needed than to follow exactly those lines which I see marked out. And so I choose my own path in the matter of style as in that of subject. I shall not take pains to make it uniform; I shall always use whatever style may come to me; I shall change it according to my whim, without scruple; I shall set down everything as I feel it, as I see it, without choice of words, without embarrassment, without worrying over the mixture. By abandoning myself at once to my recollection of the impression received at the time and to my present feeling, I shall depict the state of my mind twice over, to-wit, at the moment when the event happened to me and at the moment when I describe it; my style, uneven and unadorned, now hurried and now diffuse, now serious and now foolish, now grave and now gay, will itself form a part of my story. In a word, no matter how this work may be written, it will always be, because of its aim, an invaluable book for philosophers; it is, I say again, a document for the comparative study of the human heart, *and it is the only one in existence.*"

Rousseau's error was not the believing that, by confessing himself thus aloud before all men, in a frame of mind so different from Christian humility, he was doing a unique thing, or even a thing of the greatest interest for the study of the human heart; his error

[1] *Je ne me peindrai pas, je me farderai.*

consisted in his belief that he was doing a *useful* thing. He did not see that he was acting like the physician who should undertake to describe in an intelligible, attractive way, for the behoof of worldly and ignorant people, some strongly characterised mental weakness or disease; such a physician would be in a measure blameworthy and responsible for all the maniacs and fools by imitation and contagion whom his book would make.

The first pages of the *Confessions* are over-emphasised and decidedly painful. I find at the outset "a hiatus occasioned by a failure of memory." Rousseau speaks of *the authors of his days;* he bore at his birth the germ of an *incommodity* which time has aggravated *(renforcée)*, he says, and which now gives him occasional respites *(rélâches)* only to, etc., etc. All this is unpleasant; but beware! beside this harshness of accentuation and these native crudities, what words are these? what unwonted simplicity, intimate, and penetrating!

"I felt before I thought; that is the common lot of mankind. I experienced it more fully than others. I do not know what I did up to the time I was five or six years old. I do not know how I learned to read; I simply remember my first books and their effect on me. . . . My mother had left some novels; we began to read them after supper, my father and I. At first it was simply a question of giving me practice in reading by means of entertaining books; but soon the interest became so intense that we read by turns without intermission, and passed whole nights in that occupation. We could never put a book down until the end. Sometimes my father, hearing the swallows in the morning, would say shamefacedly: '*Let 's go to bed, I am more of a child than you.*'"

Mark well this swallow; it is the first, and it announces a new springtime of the language; we begin to detect its appearance only in Rousseau. It is from him that the appreciation of nature dates, in the eighteenth century, in France.[1] From him, too, dates, in our literature, the sentiment of domestic life, of that lowly, poor, reserved, intimate life, wherein so many treasures of virtue and amiability are amassed. Despite some details in execrable taste, where he talks about pilfering and victuals (*mangeaille*), how readily we forgive him in consideration of that old ballad of his childhood, of which he remembers only the tune and a few scattered words, but which he is for ever trying to recall, and never succeeds in recalling, old as he is, without a touching delight!

"It is a whim which I do not understand at all, but it is absolutely impossible for me to sing it through without being stopped by my tears. A hundred times I have thought of writing to Paris to have the rest of the words hunted up, that is, if there is still any one who knows them; but I am almost sure that the pleasure I take in remembering the song would disappear in great part, if I had proof that others besides my poor Aunt Suzon used to sing it."

That is the new thing in the author of the *Confessions*, that is what fascinates us by opening before us an unexpected fountain of private, domestic sensibility. And so, when we note with some regret that Rousseau

[1] [In his Essay on George Sand, Sainte-Beuve says: "It was Jean-Jacques who had the glory of first discovering nature and describing it; the natural scenery of Switzerland, of her mountains, lakes, and forests — he aroused enthusiasm for these hitherto unknown beauties.—Tr.]

did force and upturn and, as it were, run the plough through the language, we add instantly that at the same time he fertilised it and sowed it.

A man of the haughty aristocratic stock, but a pupil of Rousseau, and one who had not much more appreciation and fear of ridicule than he, M. de Chateaubriand, adopted in *René* and in his *Mémoires* this fashion of avowals and confessions, more or less direct, and he produced some astounding and magical effects with it. Let us mark the differences, however. Rousseau has not the initial elevation of mind; he is not altogether —far from it!—what we call a well-born child; he has a leaning toward vice, and towards low vices; he has shameful, concealed appetites, which do not bespeak the gentleman; he has those long periods of a timidity which changes abruptly to the effrontery of a *polisson* and a *vaurien,* as he calls himself; in a word, he has not that safeguard, the sense of honour, which M. de Chateaubriand had, from childhood, standing like an alert sentinel beside his shortcomings. But Rousseau, with all these disadvantages, which, following his example, we do not hesitate to call by their names, is superior to Chateaubriand in the sense that he is more human, more of a man, more easily moved. He has not that incredible austerity (a genuinely feudal austerity, in very truth), and those aberrations of the heart which Chateaubriand displays in speaking of his father and mother, for example. When Rousseau is on the subject of the misconduct of his father,—a worthy

man, but fond of pleasure, frivolous, and remarried, who abandons him and leaves him to his fate,—with what delicacy he touches upon that painful subject! how the whole matter is coloured by the heart! I am not speaking of the delicacy of the knight-errant, but of genuine, innate delicacy, the delicacy that springs from morality and humanity.

It is most extraordinary that this inner moral sentiment by which he was inspired, and which held him in such close relation with other men, did not warn Rousseau how far he lowered himself in many a passage of his life, and in many a phrase which he affects. His style, like his life itself, seems to have acquired something of the vices of his early education, and of the evil society which he frequented at the beginning. After a childhood passed respectably in the domestic circle, he is apprenticed, and subjected to harsh treatment, which lowers his moral tone and impairs his sense of delicacy. The terms *polisson, vaurien, gueux, fripon,* have no power to arrest his course; indeed they seem to flow from his pen with a certain complacency. His language always retained a trace of the wretched style of his early years.

I distinguish in him two varieties of change in language: one, which is due solely to the fact that he is a provincial and speaks the French of one born out of France. Rousseau will write, without a qualm, *Comme que je fasse, comme que ce fût,* etc., instead of: *De quelque manière que je fasse, de quelque manière*

que ce fût, etc.; his articulation is loud and harsh; at times he has a touch of *goître* in his voice. But this is a defect which we overlook, so completely did he succeed in triumphing over it in some delightful passages; so thoroughly, by dint of hard work and emotion, did he succeed in imparting flexibility to his diction, and to that learned and laboured style perfect suppleness and the semblance of a first gushing outflow!—The other variety of change and corruption which one may remark in him is a more serious matter in that it has to do with the moral sense; he seems to have no suspicion that there are certain things which it is forbidden to express; that there are certain degrading, disgusting, cynical expressions which the decent man dispenses with,—which he does not know.

At some time Rousseau was a servant; one detects the fact by his style in more than one place. He has no dislike either of the word or of the thing. "If Fénelon were living, you would be a Catholic," said Bernardin de Saint-Pierre to him one day, observing his emotion during some ceremonial of the faith. "Oh! if Fénelon were living," cried Rousseau, in tears, "I would try to be his footman so that I might earn the right to be his *valet de chambre.*" The lack of taste may be detected even in the emotion. Rousseau is not simply a journeyman in the language, who has been an apprentice before becoming a master, and who allows the marks of the soldering to

appear here and there; he is, morally, a man who, in his youth, has lived amid the greatest variety of conditions, and whose stomach does not revolt at certain ugly and offensive things when he mentions them. I will say no more concerning this essential vice, this blemish, which it is so painful to encounter and to be forced to denounce in so great a writer and painter, in such a man.

Slow to think, quick to feel, with intense but self-contained appetites, with daily suffering and constraint, Rousseau reaches the age of sixteen, and describes himself to us in these words :

"Thus I attained my sixteenth year, restless, dissatisfied with myself and with everything else, with no liking for my trade, with none of the pleasures of my age, devoured by desires the object of which I did not know, weeping without cause for tears, sighing without knowing why I sighed; in a word, fondly caressing my chimeras, because I saw nothing about me which was of equal value. On Sundays, after sermon, my comrades used to come for me to go out to play with them. I would gladly have escaped them if I could; but, once interested in their games, I was more eager and went farther than another; *hard to start and hard to stop*."

Always at one or the other extreme! In this passage we recognise the first phase of the thoughts, and almost of the very phrases, of René,[1] of those words which have already become sweet music, and which still sing in our ears:

"My humour was impetuous, my disposition uneven. By turns noisy and joyous, taciturn and melancholy, I would call my young

[1] [In Chateaubriand's romance of that name, published in 1802.—Tr.]

comrades about me; then, abruptly turning my back upon them, I would go and sit apart, to gaze at the fleeting cloud or listen to the rain pattering on the leaves."

And again:

"In my youth, I cultivated the Muses; there is nothing more poetic, when its passions are new, than a heart of sixteen years. The morning of life is like the morning of the day, full of purity, of images, and harmonies."

In truth René is simply this same youth of sixteen, transplanted, set down in the midst of a different nature and in the bosom of a different social condition; no longer an engraver's apprentice, son of a bourgeois of Geneva (of a bourgeois *of the lower order*), but a chevalier, of noble birth, a traveller *en grand*, enamoured of the Muses: everything, at first sight, assumes a more seductive, more poetic colouring; the unexpected aspect of the landscape and of the framework gives relief to the personality and emphasises an unfamiliar style; but the first hint of the type is there, in the passage that we have quoted, and it was Rousseau who, by looking into himself, found it.

René is a model more flattering to us, because in him all the unpleasant human qualities are veiled; he has a tinge of the colouring of Greece, of chivalry, and of Christianity, whose diverse reflections mingle on the surface. Words, in that masterpiece of art, acquire a new magic; there are words overflowing with light and melody. The horizon is magnified in every direction, and the rays from Olympus disport

themselves thereon. Rousseau offers nothing comparable to him at first glance, but he is more genuine at bottom, more real, more living. This child of toil, who goes out to play with his comrades after sermon, or to dream alone, if he can; this small youth, with the well set-up figure, the bright eye, the shrewd face, who reprobates all sorts of things more than one likes, has more reality than the other, and more life; he is a good fellow, he is emotional, he has feeling *(des entrailles)*.

The two natures, René's and Rousseau's, have each a diseased spot, too great ardour mingled with inaction and idleness, a predominance of imagination and impressibility which react upon and devour themselves; but of the two Rousseau is the more truly impressible, for he is the more original and the more sincere in his chimerical outbursts, in his regrets, in his pictures of an ideal of felicity within his reach and yet thrown away. When, as he is leaving his native country, at the end of the first book of the *Confessions,* he recalls the simple and touching picture of the obscure happiness that he might have enjoyed there; when he says to us:

"I should have passed, in the bosom of my religion, my country, my family and my friends, a peaceful and pleasant life, such as my temperament demanded, in the monotonous round of work that was to my taste, and of a society after my heart; I should have been a good Christian, a good citizen, a good father of a family, a good friend, a good workman, a good man in all respects; I should have loved my trade, *I should have done it credit perhaps,* and, after a simple and

obscure, but unruffled and happy life, I should have died peacefully amid my own people; soon forgotten, no doubt, I should at least have been regretted as long as any one remembered me" ;—

when he speaks thus, he does in truth convince us of the sincerity of his wish and of his regrets; so instinct are all his words with a vivid and profound realisation of the sweet, placid, and honourable charm of private life!

The first book of the *Confessions* is not the most remarkable, but Rousseau is exhibited therein from head to foot, with his self-esteem, his budding vices, his strange and grotesque moods, his meannesses, his obscenity (it will be observed that I take note of everything); with his pride, too, and that rebound of independence and firmness which raises him again; with his healthy and happy childhood, his sickly and martyrised youth, and, one foresees, with all that it will inspire in him later of apostrophes to society and of vengeful reprisals; with his tearful sense of the domestic, family happiness of which he had so little enjoyment; and none the less with the first whiffs of spring and those first breaths which are a signal of the natural awakening destined to burst forth in the literature of the nineteenth century. We are in danger to-day of being too insensible to these early picturesque pages of Rousseau; we are so spoiled by bright colours that we forget how fresh and new these first pictures of nature appeared at the time, and what an event they were in that society, most intellectual

and refined, it is true, but colourless, as barren of imagination as of genuine sensibility, with no trace in itself of the flowing sap which, with each recurring season, wakes to new life. Rousseau was the first to renew the infusion of that vegetable sap which is powerful to revive the delicate tree that is dying. French readers, accustomed to the artificial air of a salon atmosphere—the *urban* readers, as he calls them —were amazed and entranced when they felt those cool and refreshing mountain breezes from the Alps, which came to give new life to a literature as devoid of vital force as it was distinguished.

It was time; and it is in this view that Rousseau was not a corrupter of the language, but, all things considered, a regenerator.

Before him La Fontaine alone among Frenchmen had known and felt, to that degree, nature, and the charm of reverie off the beaten track; but his example counted for little; they let the good man go and come with his fables, and they remained in the salons. Rousseau was the first who compelled all that fine company to leave the salons, and to forsake the grand avenue of the park for the natural pathway across the fields.

The beginning of the second book of the *Confessions* is delightful and full of vigour. Madame de Warens appears for the first time. In depicting her, Rousseau's style becomes, without awkwardness, softer and mellower, and at the same time we instantly

discover one feature, an essential vein which exists in him and in his whole style, — I mean sensuality. "Rousseau had a voluptuous mind," an excellent critic has said; women play a great part in his life; absent or present, they and their charms engross him, inspire him and move him, and something of them is mingled in everything that he writes. "How did it happen," he says of Madame de Warens, "that on accosting for the first time an agreeable, polished, *dazzling* woman, a lady of a rank superior to my own, I found myself on the instant as free from constraint, as much at my ease, as if I had been perfectly sure of pleasing her?" This facility, this freedom from constraint, which ordinarily was so uncharacteristic of him when he was actually in the presence of women, was always characteristic of his style in describing them. The most fascinating pages of the *Confessions* are those relating to this first meeting with Madame de Warens, and those in which he describes the greeting of Madame Basile, the pretty shopkeeper of Turin: "She was finely arrayed and refulgent, and, despite her gracious manner, that splendour abashed me. But her very kindly greeting, her sympathetic tone, her gentle and caressing manners, soon put me at my ease; I saw that I should succeed, and that made me succeed the sooner." Have you never felt, in that "refulgence" and in that brilliancy of colouring, a ray of the Italian sun as it were? And he describes the scene, vivacious but silent, that scene carried on by gestures,

and interrupted in time, that scene overflowing with blushes and youthful desires.

Add to these passages the excursion in the outskirts of Annecy with Mesdames Galley and de Graffenreid, every detail of which is fascinating. Such pages were in French literature like the discovery of a new world, a world of sunlight and cool breezes which one has had close at hand without noticing it; they presented a combination of sensibility and naturalness, wherein the touch of sensuality appeared only so much as was permissible and necessary in order to set us free at last from false metaphysics of the heart and from the conventional cant of immateriality. Sensuality of the brush, to that extent, could hardly give offence; it is sober as yet, and it wears no mask, which makes it more innocent than that sensuality in which many painters have indulged since Rousseau.

As a painter Rousseau has in everything the sentiment of *reality*. He has it whenever he speaks of beauty, which, even when it is imaginary, as in his Julie, carries with it a body and shape that are quite visible, and is by no means an Iris, floating in the air and intangible. This sentiment of reality manifests itself in this, that he is careful that every scene that he remembers or invents shall be set, every character that he introduces shall act his part, in a definitely marked locality, the slightest details of which may be fixed in the mind and retained. One of his criticisms of the great novelist Richardson was that he did not connect

the memory of his characters with some locality which it would be a pleasure to identify by his descriptions. Observe, for example, how perfectly he has naturalised his Julie and his Saint-Preux in the Pays-de-Vaud, on the shores of that lake about which his heart had never ceased to wander. His straightforward, steadfast mind at all times lent its graving tool to his imagination, so that nothing essential should be omitted in the design. Finally, this sentiment of reality appears even in the care with which, amid all the circumstances and adventures of his career, happy or unhappy, even amid the most romantic of them all, he never forgets to mention his repast and to give the details of a healthful, frugal régime, adapted to give joy to the heart as well as to the mind.

This last point, too, is an essential one; it is referable to those natural traits of the bourgeois, of the man of the people, which I have remarked upon in Rousseau. He has been hungry in his day; he notes in his *Confessions,* with a sense of gratitude to Providence, the last time that it was his fate literally to feel poverty and hunger. And so he will never forget, even in the ideal picture of his happiness which he draws on a later page, to introduce these incidents of real life and of the common lot, these things of the entrails. It is by all these veracious details, combined as they are in his eloquence, that he seizes us and holds us fast.

Nature, sincerely *felt* and loved for itself, forms the

groundwork of Rousseau's inspiration, whenever that inspiration is sound and healthy and not diseased. When he sees Madame de Warens again, on his return from Turin, he lives some time under her roof, and from the bedroom which is given him he sees gardens and has glimpses of the open country. "It was the first time," he says, "since Bossey [the place where he had been sent to boarding-school in his childhood], that I had had *green things before my windows.*" It had been a matter of great indifference hitherto to French literature whether it had or had not *green things* before its eyes; it was Rousseau's part to call attention to that matter. From this point of view he may be defined in a word: he was the first who introduced *green things* into our literature. Living thus, at nineteen years of age, under the same roof with a woman whom he loved but to whom he dared not declare his passion, Rousseau gave way to a melancholy "in which, however, there was no touch of gloom, and which was tempered by a flattering hope." Having gone to walk alone outside of the town, on a great holiday, while the people were at vespers, he says:

"The ringing of the bells, which has always affected me strangely, the songs of the birds, the beauty of the day, the soft loveliness of the landscape, the scattered country houses wherein I fancied us two living together, all this made such a vivid, tender, melancholy, and moving impression upon me that I saw myself, as in a trance, transported to that blissful time and that blissful spot where my heart, in possession of all the felicity it could desire, would enjoy it in indescribable ecstasy, without even thinking of sensual pleasure."

Such were the feelings of this child of Geneva at Annecy in the year 1731, when people in Paris were reading the *Temple de Gnide.*[1] On that day he discovered *reverie,* that new charm which had hitherto been abandoned to La Fontaine as a mere oddity, but which Rousseau was to introduce definitively into a literature until then either dissolute or materialistic. *Reverie*—that is his novelty, his discovery, his America. His dream of that day he realised some years later, in his sojourn at Les Charmettes, in that excursion on Saint-Louis' Day, which he has described as no similar thing had ever been described before:

"Everything," he says, "seemed to conspire for the bliss of that day. It had recently rained; no dust, and the streams flowing abundantly; a light, cool wind fluttered the leaves, the air was pure, the horizon cloudless, serenity reigned in the sky as in our hearts. We dined at a peasant's cottage and shared with his family, who blessed us heartily. Those poor Savoyards are such kindly folk!"

And he goes on, in this strain of good-humour, of observation, and of artless sincerity, to develop a picture in which everything is perfect, everything enchants, and only the name *Maman,* applied to Madame de Warens, gives offence morally, and causes pain.

That brief moment at Les Charmettes, where it was given to that still novice heart to expand for the first time, is the most divine moment of the *Confessions,* and it will never be repeated, even when he has retired to the Hermitage. The description of the years

[1] [By Montesquieu; published in 1725. *See* vol. i., p. 128.—Tr.]

at the Hermitage, and of the passion which sought him out there, has much that fascinates, it is true, and perhaps more salience than all that has gone before; he was justified, however, in exclaiming: "*This is not Les Charmettes.*" The misanthropy and distrust by which he was already assailed followed him in that period of solitude. He thought constantly of the society of Paris, of d'Holbach's little coterie; he enjoyed his retirement in spite of them, but such thoughts poisoned his purest enjoyment. His character became soured, and contracted during those years an incurable malady. Doubtless he did have blissful moments, then and afterward, until the end; he found in the island of Saint-Pierre, in the centre of the Lake of Bienne, an interval of calm and oblivion which inspired some of his finest pages,—the fifth "Promenade" of the *Reveries,* which, with the third letter to M. de Malesherbes, cannot well be distinguished from the divinest passages of the *Confessions.* But in lightness of touch, freshness, and gaiety nothing in them equals the description of the life at Les Charmettes. Rousseau's true happiness, of which no one, not even himself, could rob him, was the being able to evoke thus and to draw anew, with the accuracy and vividness which marked his memory of them, such pictures of youth, even in the midst of his most disturbed and anxious years.

The *pedestrian journey,* with its vivid impressions of each successive instant, was another of Rousseau's

inventions, one of the novelties which he imported into literature; it has been much abused since. After enjoying the experience, it first occurred to him, but not until much later, to tell what he had felt. Only at such times, he assures us, when he was travelling on foot, in fine weather, through a beautiful country, without haste, having for the goal of his journey an agreeable object which he was not in too great a hurry to reach,—only at such times was he absolutely himself, and only then did his ideas, which were cold and dead in the study, come to life and take their flight.

"There is a something about walking which vivifies and sharpens my ideas; I can hardly think when I am still; my body must needs be in motion to set my mind in motion. The sight of the fields, the succession of pleasant prospects, the fresh air, the hearty appetite, the excellent health which I gain by walking, the freedom of the wineshop, the distance from everything that makes me feel my dependence, from everything that reminds me of my situation—all this sets my soul free, gives to my thoughts more audacity, casts me, so to speak, into the immensity of created things, to combine them, to select them, to appropriate them at my pleasure, without fear or constraint. I have all nature at my disposal, as its master."

Do not ask him to write down at such moments the thoughts, sublime, foolish, adorable, which pass through his mind: he much prefers to taste and relish them rather than put them in words. "Besides, did I carry paper and pens about me? If I had thought of all those matters, nothing would have come to me. I did not then foresee that I should have ideas; they come when it pleases them, not when it pleases me." And so, if we are to believe him, we have naught but

far-off recollections and indistinct fragments of himself as he was at those moments. And yet, what could be more genuine, more exact, and more delightful at once! Let us recall the night that he passed in the open air on the bank of the Rhone or the Saone, in a sunken road near Lyons:

"I lay in voluptuous ease on the platform of a sort of recess or false gateway hollowed out of a terrace wall; the canopy of my bed was formed by the tops of the trees; a nightingale was directly over my head, and I fell asleep to his singing; my sleep was delicious, my awakening even more so. It was broad daylight; my eyes, when they opened, saw the water, the verdure, a beautiful landscape. I rose and shook myself; hunger assailed me; I walked gaily toward the town, resolved to spend on a good breakfast two fifteen-sou pieces which I still had left."

There we have the natural Rousseau complete, with his reverie, his idealism, his reality; and that *fifteen-sou piece* itself, coming after the nightingale, is not misplaced to bring us back to earth, and to make us realise to the full the humble enjoyment which poverty carries hidden within itself, when it is combined with poesy and with youth.

The picturesque in Rousseau is composed, robust, and clearly outlined, even in the most delicate passages; the colours are always laid upon a fully perfected design; therein this Genevan is of the pure French breed. If he lacks now and then a warmer light and the brilliance of Italy or Greece; if, as sometimes happens about the lovely Lake of Geneva, the north wind cools the air and a cloud suddenly imparts

a greyish tinge to the mountain sides, there are days and hours of a perfect, limpid serenity. Some later writers have improved upon this style, have thought to eclipse and surpass it; they have certainly succeeded with respect to some effects of colouring and of sound. However, Rousseau's style still remains the most unerring and robust that we can put forward as a pattern in the field of modern innovation. With him the centre of the language is not much displaced. His successors have gone farther; they have not only transferred the seat of the Empire to Byzantium, but have often carried it to Antioch and to the heart of Asia. In them the imagination in its splendour absorbs and dominates everything.

I have been able simply to point out, *currente calamo,* the leading features in the author of the *Confessions,* by virtue of which he remains a master; to salute the creator of *reverie,* who inoculated us with the appreciation of nature and the sense of reality, the father of intimate literature and of interior painting. What a pity that there should be an infusion of misanthropic conceit, and that cynical outbursts should make a smirch amid so many alluring and solid beauties! But these follies and vices of the man are powerless to prevail over his innate merits, or to conceal from us the great talents by favour of which he still proves himself superior to his successors.

Extraordinary man, powerful and bewitching writer, one must constantly play a double part in passing

judgment upon him. If he was his own executioner, and if he tormented himself exceedingly, he tormented the world still more. Not only did he cast a spell upon passion—he succeeded, as Byron says, in giving to madness the aspect of beauty, and in cloaking mistaken acts or thoughts with the celestial colouring of words. He first imparted to our language a continuous force, a steadfastness of tone, a solidity of texture, which it had not before; and therein, it may be, lies his surest claim to glory. As for the substance of his ideas, everything in him is doubtful, everything may seem, fairly enough, equivocal and suspicious; sound ideas are constantly blended with false ones, and suffer from the contact. By encompassing half truths with a false glamour of evidence, he contributed more than any other writer to start the arrogant and the weak upon the pathway of error. One day, in an hour of unreserve, while talking about his works with Hume, and admitting that he was not ill-content with them in respect to style and eloquence, he happened to add: "But I am always afraid of going astray in substance, and that all my theories are overloaded with extravagant conceits." That one of his works of which he thought most highly was *Le Contrat Social,* which is in fact the most sophistical of them all, and was destined to have the most revolutionary influence upon the future.

For us, whatever common sense may tell us, for all those who are, in whatever degree, of his posterity,

poetically speaking, it will always be impossible not to love Jean-Jacques, not to forgive him much in favour of his pictures of youth, his impassioned appreciation of nature, for that *reverie*, of which he implanted the genius among us, and to which he was the first to give expression in our language.

Friedrich Melchior Grimm.

1723–1807.

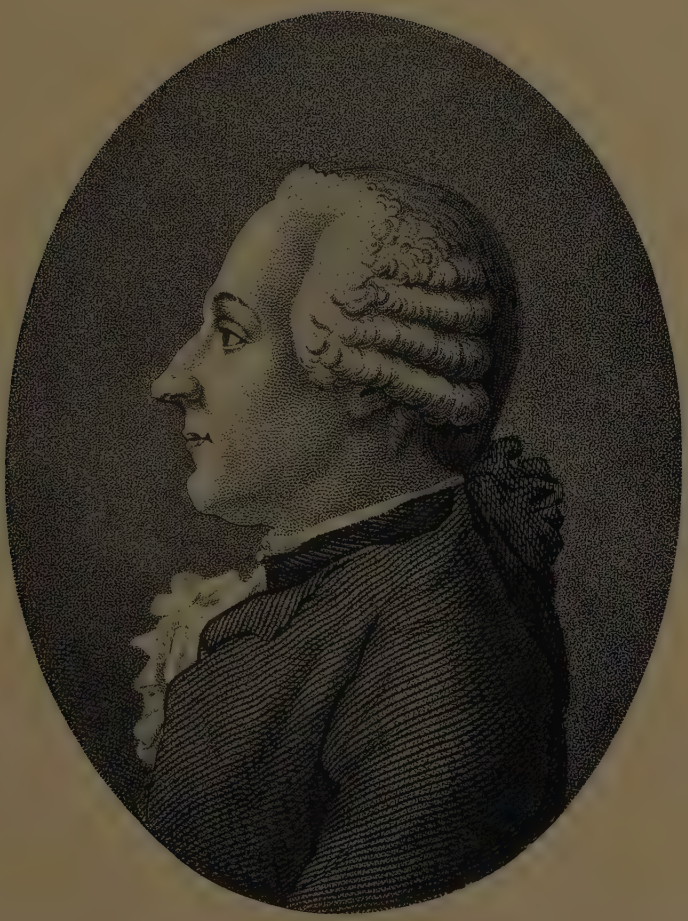
Friedrich Melchior Grimm.

GRIMM'S *Correspondance Littéraire* is one of the books which I use most freely in these cursory studies so far as they relate to the eighteenth century; and the more I have used them, the more I have found Grimm to be (speaking from a literary, not from a philosophical standpoint) a sound, shrewd, solid, well-balanced mind, an excellent critic, in a word, on a multitude of points, and always first in his judgments. Let us not overlook this last feature; when an author's reputation is established it is an easy matter to speak fittingly of him; one has only to govern oneself by the general opinion; but at his début, at the moment when he makes his first attempt and is in a measure ignorant of his own powers, and as he develops,—to judge him then with tact and accuracy, to avoid overstating his range, to predict the extent of his flight, and to divine his limitations, to offer sagacious criticisms in the face of fashion,—all this is the attribute of the born critic. Grimm was endowed with this faculty of keen judgment, which is so useful near at hand, and so unapparent at a distance. If we except the group of encyclopædists,

with which he was too much involved to speak of them without bias, but whose weak points he realised none the less, no man of that time had a keener eye for everything produced by his contemporaries.

Men are not just to Grimm; his name is never mentioned without some uncomplimentary qualification; for a long time I myself shared the common prejudice against him, and when I came to ask myself the cause of it, I found that it rested solely on the testimony of Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Confessions*. But Rousseau, whenever his self-esteem and his diseased vanity are at stake, has not the slightest hesitation about lying, and I have arrived at the conclusion that with respect to Grimm he was a liar. His lying was the more dangerous in that he brought to it the sincerity of his mania, and a curious array of details: he collected and manufactured a multitude of wretched trifles concerning his former friend, to transform them into enormities. Grimm, who saw all this stuff printed, and who lived a long while after, had too much self-respect ever to reply to them. For my own part, having emerged from that hateful labyrinth, I propose, once for all, to express my gratitude to Grimm, as to one of the most distinguished of our critics, and to attempt to present him in his true aspect, without enthusiasm (he arouses little), without partiality, but without disparagement.

Grimm was German by birth and education, and one does not detect it in the least while reading him:



FRIEDRICH MELCHIOR GRIMM.
After the drawing by Carmontelle.

his cast of thought and of expression is most perspicuous and wholly French. Born in Ratisbon in December, 1723, of a father who occupied a respectable position in the Lutheran Church, he was educated at the University of Leipsic; he had for professor there the celebrated critic Ernesti, and made the most of his learned instruction in Cicero and the classics. Grimm never made a display of erudition, but whenever it was necessary to pass judgment upon anything relating to the ancient authors, he was more prepared than the majority of French men of letters; he had a foundation of solid classicism, after the German fashion. He expresses surprise somewhere that Voltaire speaks so disparagingly of Homer in his *Essai sur les Mœurs,* in which all the honours of the epic are awarded to modern authors. "If this decree," says Grimm, "had been pronounced by M. de Fontenelle, no one would have heeded it, it would have been of no consequence; but that M. de Voltaire should be the one to put forth such an opinion is something utterly inconceivable." And he produces his triumphant arguments, altogether to the advantage of the ancient poet. The fact is that Grimm spoke thus of Homer because he had read him in the Greek, while Voltaire had simply skimmed him in French.

Grimm's first literary efforts were in German; he wrote a tragedy which may be found in the collections of German plays of that day. Many years after, at Potsdam, the great Frederick paid him the compliment

of repeating the beginning of it from memory. Born twenty-five years before Goethe, Grimm belonged to the generation preceding the great awakening of German literature, which essayed to take for its model the style of the ancients, or of the modern classics of France and England. This useful and in some sort preparatory generation, which recognised as its literary leader Gottsched, numbered among its most distinguished authors Gellert and Haller. Grimm was scarcely settled in France when he began by publishing in *Le Mercure* a number of letters on the literature of his native land; toward the close of them he mentioned the name of young Klopstock and complimented him on the first cantos of his *Messias*[1]; he predicted for his country the blooming of a new spring. "It is thus," he said, "that within about thirty years Germany has become an aviary of little birds who await only the fitting season to begin to sing. Perhaps that glorious season for the Muses of my fatherland is not far distant." Thirty years later, having received from the great Frederick an essay upon German Literature, wherein that monarch, who was a little behind the times on that point, announced the near approach of glorious days for the literature of his nation, Grimm, replying (March, 1781), respectfully called his attention to the fact that they had already

[1] [The first three of the twenty cantos were published anonymously in 1748, when Klopstock was twenty-five years old. The poem did not appear in its complete form until 1773.—Tr.]

arrived, and that there was no longer any occasion for the prediction. Although he had become a Frenchman and had long since declared himself incompetent to pass judgment in matters relating to Germany, Grimm had evidently kept an eye upon the great literary revolution which had taken place in his native country after 1770; and he himself, naturalised in Paris, deserves to be recognised, despite the difference in style and forms, as one of the older and most noteworthy collateral kindred of the Lessings and Herders.

Without fortune and without prospects, Grimm came to Paris, and was for some time attached to the suite of the young hereditary prince of Saxe-Gotha; he next became tutor to the sons of the Comte de Schomberg, then secretary to the young Comte de Friesen, nephew of the Maréchal de Saxe. In this delicate, dependent position, by his tact, his bearing, and an external reserve which was natural to him and which he never laid aside except with his most intimate friends, he was able to win respect. He developed betimes the art of decorous demeanour, and he had need of it; Rousseau is the only person who ever accused him of insincerity in that respect. Marmontel says in his *Mémoires:* "Grimm, at that time secretary and intimate friend of the young Comte de Friesen, nephew of the Maréchal de Saxe, invited us to dinner every week, and at those bachelor dinners perfect liberty was the rule; but that was a dish of which Rousseau partook very sparingly."

While working to transform himself into a Frenchman and Parisian, Grimm had a strain of German romanticism which he had to conceal and stifle. The best and best-informed of his biographers, Meister of Zurich, who was his secretary for many years, and who paints him after nature, and with gratitude, mentions a profound and mysterious passion, in his youth, for a German princess who was then in Paris; that silent passion was near making of Grimm a Werther. Another passion, the object of which we know, was that which he entertained for Mademoiselle Fel, a singer at the Opera. Grimm had an intense love of music; he took sides warmly for the Italian against the French school; therein he showed himself a man of taste, and he maintained his cause with the enthusiasm of his race and his years.

He declared that in French music, as it was at that time, one quitted the recitative, or *plain-chant,* only to shriek instead of singing. According to him there was no real singing except that of Jelyotte and Mademoiselle Fel, especially the latter; and he lost his temper with those who did not think that she had a pretty throat [*un joli gosier*]. "Ah! What a grand, beautiful voice!" he cried; "a unique voice, always the same, always fresh and brilliant and soft; by her talent she has taught her countrymen that it is possible to sing in French, and with the same courage has dared to impart an expression of her own to Italian music." He never went away from hearing her "that

his brain was not excited, that he was not in that frame of mind in which one feels capable of saying or doing fine and noble things." Hence his passion for her, which is in no wise more surprising than those which we have observed in certain dilettanti of our own time for the Sontags and Malibrans; and that passion does Grimm credit instead of making him ridiculous, as some persons have amused themselves by representing him to us.

While Grimm was inveighing against the tedium and false method of the French Opera, the Italian actors came to Paris, in 1752, and gave performances at the Opera itself. It was at the height of the disputes between Parliament and Court; thirty years later, differences of the same sort led to the Revolution of '89. A wit has said that the arrival of Manelli, the Italian singer, in 1752, averted civil war from France, because but for that arrival the idle spirits would have turned their attention to the disputes between the Parliament and the clergy, and would have embittered them still more; instead of which they descended furiously on the musical quarrel, and wasted their fire on that. At the Opera there was "the king's corner," and "the queen's corner." The music-lovers who assembled under the queen's box were the most enlightened, the most earnest, and the most zealous for the Italian innovations. Grimm distinguished himself most of all by a satirical pamphlet entitled *Le Petit Prophète de Boehmischbroda,* which

had great success. In the guise of a prophecy he told many truths concerning the taste of his contemporaries. A Voice is supposed to speak to a poor Bohemian composer of minuets. There is a word of praise for Jean-Jacques, the recent author of the *Devin du Village,* coupled with a sharp thrust. "A man," said the Voice, "with whom I do whatever I choose, *although he kicks against me.*" Refractory and freakish even in his genius, that is Jean-Jacques to the life, even at the date of the *Devin du Village.*[1]

There were, too, special compliments and distinctions for Voltaire, Montesquieu, etc. Grimm had stood the test, with respect to wit and style; he had won his spurs in French. "What is this Bohemian thinking about," said Voltaire, "to have more wit than we?" That was a certificate of naturalisation for Grimm.

He was thirty years old. Having thus mastered the language, admitted to the best society, armed with a keen intellect, and supplied with a great variety of points of comparison, he speedily found himself in a better position than any other to form an accurate judgment of France. Generally speaking, a keen-witted foreigner, who makes a sufficiently long sojourn among a neighbouring people, is better adapted to pronounce judgment upon that people than a person who is one of themselves, and who consequently is too close to them. Horace Walpole, Franklin, Galiani, in the

[1] [1752.—Tr.]

eighteenth century, judged us with marvellous and unerring accuracy at the second glance. But Grimm's judgment is more pertinent than that of any of them: he is more at home among us than Horace Walpole; he has not the clever restlessness, the incessant fluttering of Galiani, which leads him to say again and again: "I am and I mean to be entertaining." In him tranquillity and reflection are blended with shrewdness. I find in Grimm a trace of infatuation in only one particular, and that is his connection with Diderot. In the praise which he lavishes upon him, all allowance being made for the partiality of friendship, there is a remnant of Germanism. Grimm, becoming the most French of Germans, was attracted, by a sort of natural affinity, to Diderot, the most German of Frenchmen. Diderot is, in France, the German side of Grimm. Except for that, he was altogether cured of his national failing, and he did not acquire ours.

His literary correspondence with the Courts of the North and the sovereigns of Germany came to him originally through Abbé Raynal, who discharged a part of his burden upon him. It begins in 1753, with a criticism of a work of this same Abbé Raynal, of whom Grimm speaks with perfect freedom, tempering his praise with some true observations. This correspondence, which continued without interruption until 1790, that is to say, for thirty-seven years, and came to an end, so to speak, only with the old social régime of France, under the blows of the Revolution,

is a monument all the more valuable because it is without pretension and without any prearranged plan. "Paris," some one has said very truly, "is the place of all others in the world where one has the least freedom of judgment concerning the works of people who hold a certain rank." This was true when it was written, and it is true to-day. Grimm, living in society, escaped this difficulty by favour of the secrecy of his correspondence; but, although publicity is an almost insurmountable barrier to free criticism of contemporaries, secrecy is a snare which tempts one to many rash exploits, and to much evil-speaking. Grimm was high-minded enough and just enough not to fall into that little snare, and not to allow his judgment to give way to passion or to malicious curiosity. In a word, his correspondence was secret, but never clandestine.

He began by informing the princes, his correspondents, very modestly, of the current literary news and of the new books; only by slow degrees did his influence increase and his authority became more extensive. It was firmly established and consecrated when the Empress Catherine of Russia chose him for her favourite and confidential correspondent. At that time the German Courts had their eyes fixed on France; the sovereigns visited Paris incognito, and on returning to their own countries desired to keep in touch with that society, which had fascinated them. Grimm, before he held any official diplomatic post, was in fact

the minister resident and *chargé d'affaires* of the Powers to French opinion and the French intellect, at the same time that he was interpreter and secretary of the French intellect to the Powers. He fulfilled his mission, on both sides, most worthily.

We are still at the outset of his career. Rousseau, who was beginning to become famous, introduced him one day to Madame d'Épinay, a clever and attractive woman, very ill-married, wealthy, and young, who, having no one to guide her, was at this time trying her wings somewhat at hazard.

"M. Grimm," she says, "came to see me with Rousseau; I invited him to dine to-morrow. I was very well pleased with him; he is modest and courteous; I consider him shy, for he seems to me to have too much wit for his very noticeable embarrassment to have any other cause. He is passionately fond of music; we played and sang with him all the afternoon, Rousseau, Francueil, and I. I showed him some pieces of my own composition which seemed to please him. If there was anything about him that I did not like, it was his extravagant praise of my talents, which I am abundantly conscious that I do not deserve."

She says that Grimm was thirty-four at that time, but he could not have been so old. He had much success with Madame d'Épinay, who was then in one of those periods when the heart suffers, and when, while vowing to itself that it means to go on suffering, it seeks vaguely to give admittance to hope. Madame d'Épinay loved to write, and in her exercises with her pen she was not long in drawing a portrait of Grimm, which represents him in a very favourable

light, and with features which one feels to be truly described.

"His face is attractive by reason of a blending of artlessness and shrewdness; his countenance is interesting, his manner careless and indifferent. His gestures, his bearing, and his carriage indicate kindness of heart, modesty, laziness, and timidity.

"His mind is just, searching, and profound; he thinks and expresses himself with conviction, but incorrectly. Although he is a poor talker, no one succeeds better in holding the attention of his auditors; it seems to me that, in matters of taste, no one has a more delicate, keener, surer tact than he. He has a vein of pleasantry which is peculiar and which would become no one else.

"He loves solitude, and it is easy to see that the taste for society is not natural to him; it is a taste acquired by education and by habit.

"This vague tendency to seclusion and self-concentration, combined with much laziness, causes his opinion to be sometimes hesitating in public; he never gives judgment against his conviction, but he leaves it in doubt. He hates discussion and disputation; he declares that they were invented solely for the salvation of fools.

"One has to know M. Grimm intimately to realise his true worth. His friends alone are in a position to appreciate him, because he is himself only with them. Then his whole manner is different; jesting, merriment, freedom, indicate his satisfaction, and take the place of constraint and shyness.

"He is perhaps the only man who has the faculty of inspiring confidence without bestowing it."

However prejudiced Madame d'Épinay may have been in Grimm's favour, the aspect in which she presents him is in perfect accord with what Meister says of him,—Meister, a man of feeling and discrimination who wrote of him long after. Meister speaks of the attractiveness of his face, of his refined and expressive features, and at the same time he does not disguise what peculiarities there were in his personal appearance taken as a whole. "He carried his hips and

shoulders a little out of line, but not ungracefully. His nose, although it was rather large and slightly crooked, had none the less a most noticeable expression of shrewdness and sagacity; a lady said of him: 'Grimm's nose is turned, but always in the right direction.'"

It is clear that, with these same features, it would be a simple matter to make of Grimm a very ugly man and a caricature; but those who know to how great an extent expression exempts men from beauty, will rely upon the impressions of a clever woman and a judicious friend.

It is not my purpose to tell the story of the lover or of the Werther in Grimm; I propose simply to clear the character of the man, the honourable man, whom I believe that Rousseau slandered. Grimm's great offence against Rousseau was that he speedily saw through his vanity, and that he did not spare it. On the day of the first performance of the *Devin du Village,* the Duc des Deux-Ponts, on leaving the Opera, accosted Rousseau with much courtesy, and said to him: "Will you allow me to congratulate you, monsieur?" Whereupon Rousseau replied brutally: "Very well, provided that you make it short!" At all events, that was the way in which Rousseau chose to tell the story, in a boasting tone. Grimm, who was present when he told it, said to him laughingly:

"Illustrious citizen and co-sovereign of Geneva (for a portion of the sovereignty of the republic resides in you), may I venture to suggest

to you, that, notwithstanding the rigidity of your principles, you should not refuse a sovereign prince the consideration due to a water-carrier, and that if you had greeted a kindly remark from the latter with a retort so abrupt, so brutal, you would have reason to reproach yourself for a most untimely impertinence."

Rousseau (although he denies it) seems to have been more or less in love with Madame d'Épinay by fits and starts, when he was not in love with her sister-in-law, Madame d'Houdetot. Grimm, when he became most closely bound to Madame d'Épinay, had fully made up his mind concerning Jean-Jacques's character; one may say that he was the first of his friends who saw with certainty the early manifestations of his madness, and who called it by its true name. Finding an impulsive, generous woman overflowing with anxiety for the welfare of the unfortunate man of talent, he admonished her somewhat harshly for her imprudence. One day Rousseau went to see Madame d'Épinay. He had received letters urging him to return to Geneva to live; he was offered a place as librarian, with a salary—an honourable and agreeable occupation.

"What shall I decide to do?" he said. "I neither wish nor am able to remain in Paris; I am too wretched here. I would like right well to travel and to pass a few months in my republic; but in this offer that is made me it is a question of taking up my abode there, and if I accept I shall not be at liberty to come away. I have acquaintances there, but I have no intimate relations with any one. Those people hardly know me, and they write to me as to their brother; I know that that is one advantage of the republican spirit; *but I distrust such warm friends, there is some purpose behind it.* On the

other hand my heart is touched by the thought that my fatherland longs for me. But how can I leave Grimm and Diderot and you? Ah! my dear friend, how perplexed I am!"

Thereupon Madame d'Épinay becomes warmly interested; she considers; on reflection she finds for Rousseau what he desires above all things—a cottage amid the woods. She, or her husband, owns a small house called the Hermitage, in the forest of Montmorency. She determines to propose to Rousseau that he live there; she will have it arranged suitably, taking care not to seem to do anything expressly on his account. So she invites him to go there to live. Rousseau takes fright, balks,—and accepts. In the joy of her heart she tells Grimm about it.

"I was greatly surprised;" she says, "to find that he disapproved the service I had rendered Rousseau, and disapproved it in a style that at first seemed to me very harsh. I attempted to combat his opinion; I showed him the letters we had exchanged. 'I see nothing here,' he said, 'on Rousseau's part, except concealed arrogance in every word. You do him a very ill service by giving him the Hermitage, but you do yourself a very much worse one. Solitude will complete the work of blackening his imagination; all his friends will be, in his eyes, unjust and ungrateful, and you first of all, if you refuse a single time to place yourself at his orders. I see already the germ of his charges against you in the tone of the letters you have shown me. *Those charges will not be true, but they will not be absolutely devoid of truth,* and that will suffice to bring reproach on you.'"

Never was prediction more literally verified than this of Grimm. He understood perfectly that diseased mind, combined with such extraordinary talent; he was constantly opposing the indulgent, erroneous views into which his kind-hearted and too impulsive

friend was misled. "I am convinced," said Madame d'Épinay of Rousseau, "that there is only one way of taking that man to make him happy; that is, to pretend to pay no attention to him and to devote oneself to him all the time." Grimm began to laugh and rejoined: "How little you know your Rousseau! reverse your propositions if you want to gratify him; pay no attention to him, but act as if you thought about him a great deal; speak of him constantly to other people, even in his presence, and do not be deceived by the ill-temper he will show you on account of it." He added, with perfect justice, and repeated again and again, that, as he was already afflicted with latent madness, the absolute solitude of the Hermitage would result in turning his brain and scattering his ideas altogether; and towards the end of Rousseau's stay there, when his suspicions and extravagances were beginning to burst forth, Grimm wrote: "I cannot tell you too often, my dear friend, that the least evil of all the alternatives would have been to let him go back to his native country two years ago, instead of secluding him at the Hermitage. I am sure that his sojourn there will cause us annoyance sooner or later." In fact, that sojourn did cause, through the venomous pages of the *Confessions*, an undying calumny.

It does not enter into my plan to discuss that controversy here: when one reads Madame d'Épinay's *Mémoires* on the one hand and the *Confessions* on the other, it is clear that the letters cited in those works,

which might throw light on the question, are not reproduced in the same terms; that they have been altered in one case or the other, and that some one lied. I do not believe that it was Madame d'Épinay. As for Grimm's character, which is all that I am undertaking to study and elucidate here, it seems to me to stand out favourably through his very indifference. In Madame d'Épinay's *Mémoires,* he constantly exhibits himself to us as being above all paltry disputes, avoiding meddling in them, and at need showing little amiability in his advice, and maintaining some reserve, even in private; not from any ulterior motive, or from lack of confidence, but simply "because he likes neither arguments nor useless schemes." Rousseau, being the man that we know him to be, had more than one reason to bear him a grudge. In the first place, we know that Grimm and Diderot, without mentioning the fact, paid Thérèse and her mother a pension of four hundred livres: Grimm never boasted of it, and Madame d'Épinay discovered it one day by accident. Now, Rousseau did not like benefactions, and he liked even less the persons to whom he owed them. Indubitably, whoever paid a pension to persons who were closely connected with him must be a great conspirator. In the second place, Grimm's accurate mind had more than once let the daylight into Rousseau's pretensions, and touched him on his most sensitive spot. For example, Rousseau came to bring to M. d'Épinay the copies that he had made for

him of twelve pieces of music. He was asked if he would undertake to deliver as many more in a fortnight. But Rousseau, instantly blending the self-esteem of the copyist and the indifference of the amateur, replied:

"'Perhaps yes, perhaps no; it depends on my inclination, my mood, and my health.'—'In that case,' said M. d'Épinay, 'I will give you only six to do, because I must be certain of having them.'—'Very good!' retorted Rousseau; 'you will have the satisfaction of having six which will discountenance the other six; for I defy you to have any made that will approach mine in accuracy and perfection.'—'Do you see,' interposed Grimm with a laugh, 'how the conceit of a copyist has gripped him already? If you should say that not a comma is missing in your writings, everybody would agree, but I'll wager that there are some notes transposed in your copies.' Although he laughed and accepted the bet, Rousseau blushed; and he blushed even more when, upon examination, it turned out that Grimm was right."

This took place at Madame d'Épinay's house, at La Chevrette. Rousseau remained deep in thought all the evening; the next morning he returned to the Hermitage without saying a word, and he never forgave Grimm for finding errors in his copies. Such grievances (without going any farther), brooded over in solitude and magnified by a sickly imagination, were likely to give birth to many monsters.

"Being a recluse," Rousseau confesses, "I am more sensitive than other men. If I have a dispute with a friend who lives in the world, he thinks about it for a moment, and then a thousand distractions cause him to forget it the rest of the day. But there is nothing to divert my mind from his treatment of me; unable to sleep, I think about it the livelong night; alone in my daily walk, I think about it from sunrise to sunset; my heart has not a moment's reprieve, and the harsh words of a friend cause me years of sorrow in a single day."

There we have the disease and the wound laid bare. Grimm's only mistake was, perhaps, that, after a certain day, he treated that wound too much as if it were physically incurable, and that, in the perspicacity and strength of his mind, he thought too little of that other pathetic remark of his former friend: "There never was a fire in the depths of any heart that a tear would not put out." It is more than doubtful whether Grimm could have succeeded in putting out the fire in Rousseau, even with tears, but he did not try.

Moreover, Grimm was absent from France during the greater part of Rousseau's stay at the Hermitage (1756–1757); he had lost his friend the Comte de Friesen, taken away in the flower of youth, and the Duc d'Orléans had undertaken to look after his fortunes. That prince had deemed it advisable to place him in the service of the Maréchal d'Estrées during the campaign in Westphalia. Grimm was one of the *twenty-eight* secretaries of that pompous staff. He has very graphically described that "laborious" and "very magnificent" life. "We have left the heavy waggons behind; but for all that, on every day's march, it takes three hours for our indispensable equipment to pass. This is a most scandalous state of affairs and makes me more than ever convinced that the world is made up of nothing but abuses, which none but a madman would try to reform." The pillage and theft that he sees all about him are revolting to him. "Severity does not restore discipline," he says; "we

are surrounded by men hanged, and yet the slaughter of women and children goes on just the same, when they object to seeing their houses pillaged. But for this campaign," he adds, "I should never have conceived how far the horrors of poverty and the injustice of man can be carried." At the same time, in the infrequent glorious engagements, he is alive to the gallant and noble conduct of our troops. His whole correspondence, during that period, bears witness to an upright and humane heart, which is put to the test of experience, but without closing or becoming hardened.

Grimm had suffered much in his youth, and he could if he chose, he says somewhere, have made out a long list of misfortunes; he preferred to let his mind rest upon the assistance he had found in the interest and good-will of a few generous men. He owed it to this fair-mindedness and moderation that he made so many serviceable friends, and he attracted them no less by his merit than by the steadiness and dignity of his sentiments. At the time of which we are now speaking, when he was in the last years of his youth, his apparent coldness but half concealed a remnant of inward ardour, and his stoicism in no wise diminished the delicacy of his feelings. In the letters written to Madame d'Épinay during that Westphalian campaign, the advantage in the matter of loving attentions and delicate shades of sentiment is not always with his friend. He has no sooner left her than he writes to her from Metz these affectionate,

almost feminine words: "How I long to hear from you! I do not know a single thing that you will do to-morrow; *that has never happened before since I have known you!*"

Good morals suffered severely from these relations that were so easily and so publicly entered into in the society of the eighteenth century. Madame d'Épinay, although married to a most unworthy husband, was not free; the image of duty was not altogether effaced; she had children, and she prided herself, like a good mother, upon bringing them up well, upon devoting herself to their education. On this subject she consulted Rousseau, Grimm, all her friends; but did she set them the example of the virtue and respectability that she preached to them? Grimm (let us say it to his honour) was not so insensible as one might suppose to this lack of harmony between her morals and her precepts, and he was distressed by it. "One of the things," he wrote, "which make you most dear to my eyes, my dear love, is the strict watch you keep upon yourself, especially in the presence of your children. Children are keen-eyed! they seem to be playing, but they hear, they see. *Oh! how many times that fear has embittered the pleasure of moments passed with you!*" Let us ask nothing more than this avowal, let slip by one of the men who prided themselves most upon being free from prejudices; that one half-stifled lament is a homage to duty.

In his relations with Madame d'Épinay Grimm is

from the first, and before all else, a critical guide and a judicious adviser; those qualities, so essential even in friendship, are very noticeable in him. "How judicious are his ideas!" she writes again and again after listening to him; "how impartial his advice!" He marks out for her a line of conduct to repair the extreme injury she has done herself by her inconsequence and her enthusiasm. He gives her the most accurate opinions and the wisest directions with respect to all the people about her; he warns her of her own failings. "Do nothing hastily, I entreat you! it is one of your old failings always to go too fast. My dear love, nature acts slowly and imperceptibly; it has given you lovely eyes; use them, and act, I pray you, as nature does." All his efforts are aimed at maturing "that dear head which has such lovely eyes." Madame d'Épinay, who was especially blessed with a keen and profound sense of probity, appreciated his unerring tact at its true value. "I no longer have any doubt when M. Grimm has given his opinion." This oracular character is natural enough to all masters of criticism; Grimm, beneath a polished exterior and a worldly air, could not keep from expressing it in his words and in his conduct; he liked to set the style; he had that rigorous and exacting common sense which is rarely unaccompanied by some roughness of manner. His friends jestingly called him "the Tyrant." Was not Malherbe, in his day, called "the Tyrant of words and syllables"?

Those of Grimm's letters which relate to the rupture with Rousseau when he left the Hermitage are masterpieces of tact and precision, and of healthy views concerning that diseased heart. He imparts to his friend his own perspicacity and his lucidity of judgment. Rousseau, to excuse himself from all gratitude to Madame d'Épinay, pretends to suspect her of some base and heinous act or other,—of an anonymous letter to Saint-Lambert about him,—and he takes that occasion to write her an insulting letter; it is easy to lose oneself in that labyrinth of bickerings and villainies.

"The harm is done," said Grimm; "you would have it so, my poor dear, although I always told you that you would suffer for it. It is certain that all this will result in some devilish scrape which no one can foresee; to my mind it is a very great pity already that you have laid yourself open to receiving insulting letters. One can forgive one's friends for anything except insults, because they can come only from contempt. You are not sensitive enough to insults, as I have often told you; one should feel them and not take vengeance for them; that is my principle."

Madame d'Épinay, having trouble with her lungs, and wishing to have the opinion of Doctor Tronchin, went to Geneva. Grimm, being detained by some urgent work with Diderot, did not join her at once; in the meantime she saw Voltaire, who was then at Les Délices.

"So you have dined with Voltaire?" Grimm writes to her. "I do not see why you should decline his invitations; you must try to stand well with him, and to make the most of him as the most fascinating, the most agreeable, and the most famous man in Europe; *so long as you do not seek to make an intimate friend of him, all will go well.*"

We see how justly he estimated the two most celebrated men of letters of that day, and he knew the others equally well.

It was about this time (1759) that Grimm's literary pursuits began to occupy a greater place in his life, and to become more extended. The months that he had passed at Geneva with the invalid, and in daily familiar intercourse, seemed to him the acme of happiness, which he could never hope to know again. Like a man of foresight he determined, while continuing to cultivate his friendships, to provide an abundance of occupation for the stern and serious years to come; he chose to demonstrate that he was no longer an idle and useless being. Overtures were made to him by one of the Northern Courts, which he does not name, to enter into a correspondence with it. "It is the sort of occupation that I like," he says, "and it suits me especially in that it puts me in a position to show what I am able to do." He had first to obtain the consent of the Duc d'Orléans, in whose service he still was. The correspondence which he had carried on up to that time, and which we have from 1753, was not in his own name perhaps, but in Raynal's. However that may be, he becomes more and more the domestic critic in ordinary and the literary chronicler of the age. The voluminous collection of his sheets, despite errors and patchwork, despite the pieces by different hands which have found their way into it, forms a solid work and deserves to be

inscribed in Grimm's name. It was his mind that dictated the principal parts of it, and it is not difficult to follow therein an original train of thought, which resembles neither La Harpe's nor Marmontel's, which is of an entirely different order from theirs, and which, in its best moments, need not fear comparison with Voltaire's. I will try to lay hold of it and to make it apparent to the reader in a few decisive particulars.

France, it seems to me, owes Grimm reparation; too often he has been paid for the consecration of his services and his talents to our literature only by an altogether unjust and in some respects inhospitable judgment.

Grimm's *Correspondance* is generally considered rather solemn, a little cruel in its impartiality, and even slightly satirical; but Grimm had, to start with, genuine enthusiasm and that love of the beautiful which is the inspiration of true criticism. In a letter written in 1752, against the opera of *Omphale,* he says: "I confess that I consider the admiration and respect which I entertain for all real talent, of whatever sort it may be, as my greatest blessing next to love of virtue." It was not long since Grimm had come from Germany when he wrote that sentence. At the beginning of his *Correspondance* he continues to hold the same sentiments; his tone and his meaning are nothing less than frivolous; in the secrecy which is assured him he sees only an additional reason for using absolute frankness. "Love of truth demands this

strict justice as an indispensable duty," he says, "and even our friends will have no ground for complaint, because criticism whose only objects are justice and truth, and which is not inspired by the shameful wish to find that bad which is good, may indeed be mistaken and obliged sometimes to retract, but can never offend anybody."

In Grimm's day it was still the custom to call articles written about books "Extracts," and these extracts, sanctioned and sanctified by the example of the *Journal des Savants,* were in most cases confined to an exact and dry analysis of the work in question; "on the pretence of giving its substance, they produced only a skeleton of it." Grimm was not in favour of that heavy, mechanical sort of criticism, which is of the same type as the report of a police magistrate. According to him, good books should not be studied by extracts, but should be read. "Poor books need only to be forgotten; so that it is simply bothering us to no purpose to give us extracts from them; and in good policy, journalists should be forbidden to mention a book, good or bad, when they have nothing to say about it." *To examine and rectify* — that is his object in his letters, "and that should be the aim of all journalists." Herein Grimm is an innovator to a certain extent, and he assuredly places newspaper criticism where it belongs.

It is interesting to observe the excesses and extremes of the type. The first method adopted by the

Journal des Savants, the oldest of the literary journals, was one extreme; it consisted in a statement pure and simple, a sort of description of the book, in many cases differing little from a table of contents. The purpose, however, and the utility of this method, at a time when communication was less easy than to-day, was to keep the scholars of the various countries posted concerning new works, and to offer them at least reliable and faithful extracts, pending the time when they could procure the work itself. Another extreme in the opposite direction, into which some have fallen in our own day (and I am speaking now of serious criticism, of that of some English and French reviews, for example), is to give hardly any idea of the book which one is supposed to be writing about, and to look upon it simply as a pretext for the promulgation of new considerations, more or less appropriate, and of new essays; the original author, on whom one's arguments are based, disappears; it is the critic who becomes the principal, the real author. These are books written about books. Grimm's method lies between the two and is perfectly balanced.

"What is a 'literary correspondent'?" inquired Abbé Morellet one day, who had been criticised right merrily by Grimm, and, in his old age, had had the vexation of seeing that gentle raillery printed; and Morellet answered his own question thus: "He is a man who, for a little money, undertakes to entertain a foreign prince every week, at the expense of whom

it may concern, and, generally speaking, of every literary production that sees the light, and of the man who happens to be the author." Abbé Morellet spoke thus because he was prejudiced; but Grimm, despite a few inevitable inadvertences and hasty judgments, does not belong in the inferior class to which the abbé-economist would like to relegate him. As a general rule, he aims to instruct the princes, his correspondents, much more than to amuse them; and when one was read by Frederick the Great or by Catherine, one certainly had a constituency which was equal to many another, and which demanded solid substance in its entertainment. Such minds as those it was really honourable to entertain.

Grimm, in respect to inspiration, may boldly be likened to the school of the masters in criticism, of the Horaces, the Popes, and the Boileaus; he has their keen, enthusiastic, irritable sensitiveness in the matter of taste. His severity is in proportion to his very faculty of admiration. Having to discuss the tragedy of *Philoctète* by Châteaubrun (March, 1755), he notes all its defects, especially its unnaturalness, its utter lack of genius. According to him there are three deadly things: a tragedy in which the speeches are false, a picture in which the colouring is false, an operatic air in which the enunciation is false.

"And the man who can stand such things," he declares, "may follow his own bent in his pleasures and his tastes; he will never be keenly affected by what is truly beautiful and sublime. When you

are in a position to feel beauty and to grasp its nature, frankly you are no longer content with mediocrity, and whatever is ugly distresses and annoys you in the same degree that you are enchanted with the beautiful. It is therefore false to say that one should not have an exclusive taste, if the meaning is that one must put up with mediocrity in works of art, and even make the best of what is ugly. People who are so accommodating have never known the joy of feeling the enthusiasm inspired by the masterpieces of the great geniuses, and it was not for them that Homer, Sophocles [I omit Richardson, whom Grimm places in company that is too good for him], Raphael and Pergolese worked. If such indulgence for poets, painters, and musicians should ever become general among the public, it would be a sign that taste had utterly vanished. . . . People who admire ugly things so readily are not in a frame of mind to appreciate beautiful ones."

When nature has once endowed a person with such acuteness of tact and such sensitiveness to impressions, if these qualities are not joined with a creative imagination, that person is a born critic, that is to say, an admirer and judge of the creations of others.

When we open Grimm's volumes to-day, let us not forget that his pages were originally written for foreigners. Byron or Goethe, on reading him, would acquire a just and complete idea of the literature and the mode of life of that time; and Byron bestowed the greatest praise on him when he wrote carelessly in his journal, or "Memorandum," at Ravenna, these words: "All in all, he is a great man in his kind."

We Frenchmen, who know beforehand and by tradition a multitude of things that are found in Grimm, ought not to read him through, but to take him up here and there, in the significant passages. An excellent index is a sufficient guide for that purpose.

What does Grimm think, for example, I will not say of Homer, Sophocles, Molière (he speaks of them only incidentally), but of Shakespeare, of Montaigne, and of all the men of the eighteenth century — Fontenelle, Montesquieu, Buffon, Voltaire, Jean-Jacques, Duclos, and the rest? By questioning him concerning them, we shall very soon come to know him in the quality of his intellect and the excellence of his judgment.

Concerning Shakespeare he is the most advanced and the most perspicuous of the French men of letters of his day. His opinion has the more weight in that he has a more profound realisation of the genius of the masters of our stage, and considers them more in harmony with the genius of French society. He never advises the French to abandon their own type of tragedy in order to imitate foreign beauties. "On the contrary he will say: 'Frenchmen, cherish your tragedies carefully, and remember that, if they have not the sublime beauties which we admire in Shakespeare, neither have they the gross faults which mar those beauties.'" When passing judgment upon the French tragedy of his time, he is fully aware of all its weaknesses and dulness; he indulges in some reflections on this subject, which are suggested to him by La Harpe's *Timoléon,* but which go farther back and aim higher. These four or five pages of Grimm (January 1, 1765) establish the real similarities and the fundamental distinctions between the tragedy

of the ancients and our own. Shakespeare, despite his faults, often seems to him nearer to the ancients than ourselves. He recognises him as being in the first rank with respect to the luminous progression of the *ensemble,* the power of the plot, and the principal effects which the stage aims to achieve—with respect to "that great hoard of interest of which he seems to interrupt the flow at his pleasure, and which he is always sure to set in motion again with the same energy." But where he finds him incomparable is in the art of drawing character and of imparting to all his characters an air of reality.

"What genius ever penetrated more profoundly into all the peculiarities, all the passions of human nature? It is evident from his works themselves that he had but an imperfect acquaintance with antiquity; if he had been familiar with its great models, doubtless the arrangements of his plays would have been improved; but, even if he had studied the ancients with as much care as our greatest masters have done, even if he had lived on familiar terms with the heroes whom he strove to depict, could he have represented their characters with greater truth to life? His 'Julius Cæsar' is as full of Plutarch as 'Britannicus' is of Tacitus; and if he did not learn history more thoroughly than any one, it must be said that he divined it, at all events so far as men's characters are concerned, better than any one ever learned it."

After this, it is not surprising that the English critics, and notably the judicious Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review,* attributed great weight to the testimony of Grimm, as a useful auxiliary in the war which they were then (1813) preparing to renew against the dramatic authors of the continent. But, we repeat, although he admits its shortcomings, Grimm does not

sacrifice French tragedy to that of our neighbours; he recognises the fact that each is adapted to the nation and the class which it moves and interests. "One [the English stage] seems to be intent solely upon strengthening the character and morals of the nation, the other [the French stage] solely upon enervating them." Grimm goes farther; he thinks that the same tableaux which one of the two nations has witnessed without any risk, however terrible and terrifying their truth to nature, could not well be exhibited without inconvenience to the other, which would instantly misuse them. "And might these not even result," he asks, "in something altogether opposed to the moral purpose of the stage?"

With Montaigne, Grimm is at the very heart of France, and of old France; it is as if he were at home. After all that has been written about the author of the *Essais,* he finds things to say which no one has said so well. He observes that, although there is in the *Essais* an infinitude of facts, anecdotes, and quotations, Montaigne was not, properly speaking, a learned man. "He had read almost nothing but a few Latin poets, a few books of travel, and his Seneca and his Plutarch,"—the latter especially; Plutarch, "is in very truth the *Encyclopédie* of the ancients; Montaigne has given us the flower of his work, and he has added to it the shrewdest reflections, and, above all, the most secret results of his own experience."

The eight pages that Grimm devotes to Montaigne's

Essais form perhaps the most impartial, the most cogently reasoned, and the most elegantly expressed of French criticisms of that work. I might cite some of the bright sallies that are to be found there; but it is the sound sense and the logical coherency of that delightful passage which give it its value.

Grimm's philosophy is gloomy and barren; he is a sceptic, and on the days when he is sceptical on his own account, he is so without a smile; we will recur to this subject. But in speaking of Montaigne, he softens. Since the circle of human knowledge is so limited, and since one can hardly flatter oneself that one can extend the limits of the human intellect, what is a philosophical author to do who wishes still to interest his readers? According to Grimm, there are only two ways to go about it: either to exert oneself to point out as clearly as possible how small a number of truths one may know (which was what Locke did); or else to *paint in vivid colours the particular impression* one receives from these same truths, which serves at all events to multiply one's points of view; and this is what Montaigne did. The majority of so-called authors content themselves with working over the ideas of other men, which they twist and turn, and adapt to the taste of the moment; nothing is more rare than that vivacity and that courage to describe his own thought and his own feelings, which make the original author. Montaigne is original, even in his erudition; he is original even in the ideas which

he borrows from others, "because he makes use of them only when he has found an idea of his own, or when he has been impressed by them in some novel and strange way."

To excuse Montaigne's self-love, Grimm invents an argument of great acumen and shrewdness; observing that self-love is less offensive when it shows itself without concealment and with good-nature, he adds: "Far from excluding feeling for others, it is often the surest token and measure thereof. A man is interested in his fellow men only in proportion to the interest which he takes in himself and which he dares not expect from them." And he quotes on this subject a remark of Rousseau, who, having unbosomed himself one day to a friend, observed that that friend (perhaps it was Grimm himself) received his confidence without reciprocating. "Can it be that you don't love me?" cried Rousseau: "you have never told me any good of yourself."

Concerning Montesquieu Grimm expresses himself with admiration and respect, but in few words; he proclaims him a genius abounding in virtue, and salutes him at his obsequies. All of Montesquieu's great works had appeared when Grimm began his *Correspondance*. If he had been called upon to give his views of the historical method adopted in those works, he would have raised some objections.

"I do not like," he says, apropos of some book treating of political considerations, "I do not like overmuch these outlines of *a priori*

political theories, although they have in their favour the authority of Président de Montesquieu, who is particularly addicted to them. It always seems to me that, if the author who proceeds by that method had no knowledge of historical events *a posteriori*, the principles from which he claims to deduce them would not enable him to divine a single one, an evident proof that these principles are made by hand and after the event, that they are rather ingenious than solid, and that they are not the true sources of the action that is attributed to them. . . . In politics nothing ever happens twice in the same way."

Grimm's politics are gloomy, sceptical, or readily become negative like his philosophy. He has little belief in the general progress of the time; progress, when it does take place, or the arrests of decadence, seem to him mainly due to exceptional individuals, great geniuses, great legislators, or princes, who cause mankind to take unhoped-for steps forward, or spare it backward steps that are inevitable sooner or later. His ideas concerning the origin of society differ little from those of Hobbes, Lucretius, Horace, and the Epicureans of old. Profoundly impressed by the difficulty of the social conception in so far as it rises above a primitive sort of gathering, altogether instinctive and rude, and arrives at genuine civilisation, he believes it to have been impossible except by force of miraculous passions in some individuals, and of the heroic power of genius. "It must be," he thinks, "that the first legislators of the primitive societies, even the most imperfect, were men of supernatural powers or demigods." Thus, in politics, Grimm resembles Machiavelli more than he does Montesquieu, who gave more credit to the genius of mankind itself.

Concerning Buffon, Grimm gives us some profound reasoning and some excellent judgments. Taking up the general discussions which Buffon has placed at the beginning of several volumes of his *Histoire Naturelle*, he estimates them from a literary standpoint, as a man born under the French constellation of Malherbe, Pascal, and Despreaux would do. "One is justly surprised," he says, "to read discourses of a hundred pages written, from the first line to the last, always with the same nobility of style and the same fire, adorned with the most brilliant and the most natural colouring." Surely he was no longer a foreigner who could thus appreciate the consistent and constant beauty of a Frenchman's style. As for the substance of his ideas, he ventures more than once to raise objections. There is one especially of a moral and literary order: "M. de Buffon has always surprised me," says Grimm, "by the intimate conviction which he seems to have of the certainty of his theory concerning the earth. If it were among the small number of manifest truths as to which there cannot be two opinions, he could not speak of it more confidently." Rousseau seemed to him to stand in the same position with respect to his theory concerning the wild state of mankind, that alleged golden age of felicity and virtue. While marvelling at the confidence in their respective theories of those men of powerful talents, "who do not abound in ideas," Grimm does not fail to reflect sometimes that that prepossession is neces-

sary perhaps to give to their writings that fervour and that force which are so noticeable in them, whereas "the modest and humble sceptic is almost always silent."

Voltaire is nowhere better described, as to his works and as to his character, than by the detail of the anecdotes and the *ensemble* of the judgments which are set down in Grimm's pages. There are some passages (such as those on the death of Voltaire) which seem to me too emphatic to be by Grimm, and which are, at all events, a tribute paid to the public opinion of the moment. The shrewd and accurate judgments, the interesting revelations, are found on a hundred other pages. Grimm explains very clearly how and why Voltaire is not comic in his comedies; in his *Ecossaise*, for example, he has not succeeded in making of his Frélon, who tells himself all sorts of truths, a comic character. "We see in this comedy, and, generally speaking, in all of M. Voltaire's humorous works, that he never realised the difference between the ridicule that one heaps upon oneself and the ridicule that is heaped upon one by other people." And it is the latter that is truly comic. He is equally alive to Voltaire's lack of certain qualities of a genuine historian:

"In general the writing of history requires a serious and profound genius. Lightness of touch, facility, charm, all those things which make of M. Voltaire so seductive a philosopher and the first *bel-esprit* of the age—all these are but ill-adapted to the dignity of history. The very rapidity of his style, which may be invaluable in the description of a battle or the sketch of a picture, is sure to offend ere long."

In philosophy he treats him with the scorn of a man who has not stopped half way, and whose unbelief is not, at all events, inconsistent. Voltaire, on the other hand, does stop half way, and while continuing to do harm, takes fright now and then at his own audacity. "He reasons thereupon like a child," says Grimm, "but like the pretty child that he is." After *Tancrède* everything that Voltaire writes for the stage seems to him to be stamped with the seal of old age; but, on his death, he resumes his scrutiny of him in his entirety, and with the admiration which such a career inspires; he sets forth very clearly his opinion of the literary decadence, which, according to his view, Voltaire retarded, and which then resumed its headlong course. "Since Voltaire's death a vast silence reigns in these regions and reminds us every instant of our losses and our poverty." He wrote this to Frederick in January, 1784.

Grimm is classic in this sense, that, with respect to imagination and the arts, he believes that there is a single great age in the life of a nation. Without claiming to understand the causes of this fact, it seems to him that constant experience has sufficiently demonstrated it.

"When that age has passed, great geniuses are lacking; but as the taste for art still exists in the nation, men seek to do by dint of wit what their masters have done by dint of genius, and, wit having become more general, everybody makes pretensions to it before long; hence sound wit becomes rare, and mere piquancy, false *bel-esprit*, and pretension take its place."

Thus in France he hails as incomparable the age of Louis XIV, and he finds in the eighteenth century only a single class of superior men and of a special type: "I will call them *philosophers of genius;* such are M. de Montesquieu, M. de Buffon, etc." Voltaire is the only man of letters pure and simple, the only poet, who sustains genuine taste by his charms of style, his imagination, and his natural fertility; but, according to Grimm, he simply supports what was already tottering.

Rousseau is not maltreated in Grimm's letters, as one might imagine; he is constantly spoken of with appreciation for his talents, at the same time that his theories are refuted. Grimm lays hold at the outset of the *Discours sur Inégalité,* in which Rousseau's theory may be found in its entirety, and from which all the rest will flow. In a most judicious and most respectful discussion, he strives to grasp the point at which the eloquent and extravagant writer takes the wrong road, and at which his doctrine becomes extreme; he labours to refute and set right his idea. Rousseau for ever prates of leading mankind back to some vague primitive age of gold at which he regrets that the human race did not halt in its progress.

"Let us suppose with M. Rousseau," says Grimm, "that the human race is now at the age which corresponds to sixty or seventy years in the individual,—is it not evident that it cannot be charged to a man as a crime that he is sixty years old? And is it not as natural to be sixty as to be fifteen? Now, the race cannot be blamed for that for which an individual cannot be blamed."

I commend as a most excellent moral chapter to set in opposition to Rousseau's assertions the chapter which begins the year 1756 with these words: "I have often marvelled at the vain pride of man." Sometimes Grimm begins the year with some general reflections which are grand in their solemnity. In the species of biography of Rousseau which he writes on the publication of *Émile* (June 15, 1762), Grimm checks himself in his reminiscences at what would be an indiscreet disclosure and a violation of their former friendship; and after going over the principal periods of Rousseau's life, his first more or less freakish efforts, he adds: "His private and domestic life would be no less interesting; but it is written in the memory of two or three of his former friends, who have maintained their self-respect by not writing of it anywhere." If Grimm had been a perfidious traitor, as Rousseau believed, what an excellent opportunity he had there, to tell secretly, by way of contrast to *Émile*, what Rousseau did with his own children, and a mass of other details which have since become known only through the *Confessions!* Instead of that, he maintained a dignified reserve; he confined himself to giving the main features of the man's character, while he discussed his writings minutely. When, about 1780, there appeared that extraordinary work entitled *Rousseau, Juge de Jean-Jacques*, wherein is seen "the most amazing medley of vigour of style and weakness of mind, all the confusion of a deeply wounded sensi-

tiveness, inconceivable absurdity, and madness the most serious and most deserving of pity," Grimm found therein a subject of reflections, noteworthy for their moderation and humility, upon the unfortunate human intellect. "Generally speaking," said the English critic Jeffrey, discussing a portion of this *Correspondance* of Grimm, "all that he has to say about Rousseau is frank and judicious."

There is between Grimm and Diderot, despite their close intimacy and their reciprocal admiration, this essential difference: Diderot is a teacher also, and Grimm is not. A very interesting conversation between them brings out clearly the point of divergence. Grimm and Diderot were talking together one evening—January 3, 1757; Diderot was in one of those periods of philosophic excitement and prediction which were frequent with him: he saw the world in bright colours, and the future governed by reason and by what he called light *(lumières)*; he lauded his epoch as the grandest that mankind had seen thus far. Grimm doubted, and recalled the enthusiast to reality.

"We are for ever boasting of our epoch," he said to him, "and therein we do nothing new. In all ages men have preferred the instant at which they lived to that boundless expanse of time which preceded their existence. By some miracle, the illusion of which is handed down from generation to generation, we look upon the period of our own lives as a time most favourable to the human race, and distinguished in the annals of the world. . . . It seems to me that the eighteenth century has surpassed all others in the eulogiums that it has heaped upon itself. . . . A little more and the best minds will persuade themselves that the mild and peaceful empire of

philosophy is about to succeed the long tempests of unreason, and to establish for ever the repose, the tranquillity and the happiness of mankind. . . . But unluckily the true philosopher has less consoling but more accurate notions. . . . I am therefore a long way from believing that we are approaching the age of reason, and I lack but little of believing that Europe is threatened by some fatal revolution."

I abridge, but I give the tenor of the conversation as it was written down by Grimm in January, 1757. Diderot combated these objections on his friend's part; he waxed excited and declaimed in his most eloquent style: "the age of philosophy was indubitably destined to regenerate the world." The door opens, a servant enters with a horrified air. "The king is assassinated!" he exclaims. He referred to the murderous assault of Damiens. Grimm and Diderot exchanged glances in silence, and Diderot made no further reply at that time.

Grimm, at about the age of fifty, became a courtier: appreciated at his true value by the distinguished or eminent princes who then reigned in Germany, and by the Empress of Russia, he did not feel called upon to decline their favours or their benefactions. Therein he became once more to some extent a German. The Duke of Saxe-Gotha appointed him his minister to the French Court; the Court of Vienna conferred upon him the diploma of a baron of the Holy Empire, and the Court of St. Petersburg made him a colonel, then councillor of State, and grand knight of the second class of the Order of St. Vladimir.

We have a portion of his correspondence with Frederick the Great; that which he carried on with the Empress Catherine, and especially the letters that he received from her, would be of the deepest interest. Catherine had the highest opinion of him and of his intellect. She wrote to Voltaire in September, 1773: "I had the pleasure of seeing M. Grimm appear in the suite of the Hereditary Prince of Darmstadt. His conversation is a delight to me; but we have so many things to say to each other that thus far our interviews have been marked by more eagerness than order or sequence." In the midst of these conversations, in which she wholly forgot herself, she would suddenly rise and say laughingly that she must attend to a *gagne-pain;* that was her name for business of state and the trade of royalty.

There remains one aspect of Grimm's character which may be revealed some day, and which it will be interesting to know. Such intimate relations with the powers placed him in a position where he could often assist merit; and if we find him at times severe or slightly satirical in his judgments, those persons who knew him best assure us that he could be amiable in private; he took pleasure in directing the attention of his august correspondents to the talents of men of letters and artists who were worthy to be honoured or patronised.

Among the benefactions which Catherine bestowed at his recommendation, there is one which seems to me

to be touching. Madame d'Épinay, in the last years of her life, had found herself in distress financially; the reforms which M. Necker had introduced in the administration of the farmers-general had reduced her income materially. Catherine, being informed by Grimm, desired to repair the misfortunes of a woman of intellect, and she herself displayed in the matter a woman's delicacy combined with the grandeur of a sovereign. On this occasion Grimm in his gratitude exclaims: "Ah! who ever carried farther than Catherine the great art of kings—that of taking and of giving!" In the way of exquisite flattery Voltaire could have done no better.

A biographer tells us that Grimm in his youth, while a student at the University of Leipsic, was especially struck by his reading of Cicero's treatise *De Officiis,* as interpreted by the learned Ernesti, and that he carried away from the university a profound impression of that work. Between that time and the day when he addressed these thanks and this praise to Catherine, Grimm had travelled far,—we may say that he had traversed the whole circle of moral experience.

The French Revolution impressed Grimm but did not surprise him. We already know what his politics were. From the first day, he opposed to that immense, almost universal uprising, reasonable and dispassionate arguments, which touched upon every illusory feature in the vertigo of the moment, but which did not make enough account of the gravity

of the issues at stake. His constitution was all contained in these lines of Pope: "Let fools contend over forms of government; that which is best administered, whatever it may be, is the best." The events which followed were only too well adapted to confirm him in his favourite idea, that "the cause of the human race was beyond hope," and that the sole resource was at best in some great and good prince, here and there, of the type which fate bestows upon the earth; in "one of those privileged souls who repair for a time the ills of the world." It was many years since, writing to Mademoiselle Voland, Diderot's friend, and speaking of truth and virtue as two great statues which Diderot loved to fancy towering above the earth's surface, immovable amid ruins and destruction, he cried: "And I too see them; but what does it avail that those statues are eternal and immovable, if there is no one to gaze upon them, or if the fate of him who sees them does not differ from the fate of the blind man who walks in darkness?" In his essentially aristocratic doctrine he still thought that virtue and liberty, as he understood them, had no place in this world, except for a small number, an elect few, and only "on the express condition that they enjoy them without overmuch boasting."

These gloomy ideas, which he had always cherished, and in which he held the majority of mankind very cheap, became more habitual to him and more constantly present in the years of his unhappy old

age, after he had lost all his friends, and when society, apparently turned topsy-turvy, returned to life in such strange fashion.

Almost blind, having survived his friends and himself, and vegetating in retirement at Gotha, Grimm died on December 19, 1807, at the age of eighty-four. His mind, already asleep, did not awake at the roar of the cannon of Jena. We have few details concerning the close of his life, and it may be that there were none of interest. He had missed, as he used sometimes to say, "the moment to have himself buried."

Madame d'Épinay.

1725–1783.

Madame d'Épinay.

THERE is no book which depicts more faithfully the eighteenth century, its society and morals than the *Mémoires* of Madame d'Épinay. When they were first published, in 1818, there was a great outcry. We were still so near to the principal characters; they had hardly disappeared, and their descendants were only of the first generation. In society and in families people showed that they were sensitive to such publicity, as they were sure to be; they blushed and suffered. There was some idiot or other who, on the pretext that he was half-related by marriage to somebody, began to raise a riot in every direction and addressed petition after petition to the king's ministers. Nor did literature, on its side, remain unmoved. The blind admirers of Jean-Jacques Rousseau took up the cudgels for him against the new witnesses who accused him and convicted him of madness and perhaps of falsehood. Even Duclos had his defenders. The lapse of thirty years has sufficed to let many rumours fall into oblivion and to allay much excitement. The disadvantages attendant upon so sudden and so vivid a revelation have disappeared;

the slight errors or infidelities of the pencil, the inaccuracies in detail, have lost their importance. What remains is the general view of the morals of the time, the background of the picture, and nothing could seem more true or more alive. The *Mémoires* of Madame d'Épinay is not a book, it is an epoch.

It was not exactly Madame d'Épinay's intention to compose memoirs; but at an early age she loved to write, to keep her journal, to trace *the history of her soul*. That was the fashionable mania of that time. The journal that one keeps of one's life is also a sort of mirror. Jean-Jacques Rousseau used that mirror freely, and passed it on to the women of his time. Every woman of wit and sensibility, following his example, kept a record of her impressions, her memories, her dreams; she wrote her "confessions" *in petto*, even though they were the most innocent in the world. And when she became a mother she nursed her child if she could; at all events she set about superintending its education, not only in detail and in the good old way, by maternal fondling, kisses, and smiles, but also theoretically; she would discuss methods and discourse thereupon without end. It was the time of the Genlis, of those wanton or frivolous women who became at a certain point Mentors and Minervas, and composed moral treatises on education during the brief intervals of leisure which their lovers left them.

Madame d'Épinay, who wrote treatises on educa-

MADAME D'ÉPINAY.

From an old engraving.

tion (and treatises crowned by the Académie) and who had lovers, was of finer grain than the women to whom I refer. But, being only a very amiable, very clever person, and not of superior endowments, she fell under the influences of her time. At the beginning of her liaison with Grimm, pining for him during his campaign in Westphalia on the staff of Maréchal d'Estrées (1757), and inspired by hearing the letters of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* read aloud about the same time, she conceived the idea of writing, herself, a sort of romance, which should be the story of her own life, and in which she would disguise nothing but the names. That was one way of informing her friends of many things which she was not sorry that they should know if she need not tell them *viva voce*. She sent Grimm two huge packages of manuscript. Grimm was delighted with it, and, although in love, he was not enough so to disturb his critical sense. "On my word," he said of this composition, "it is fascinating. I was very tired when it was handed to me; I ran my eye over it, and I could not put it down; at two o'clock in the morning I was still reading; if you go on in the same style, you will surely produce a unique work."

Grimm was right, and Madame d'Épinay's work is really unique in its kind. "But do not work at it," added the excellent critic, "except when you really feel an inclination to do so, and above all things never remember that you are writing a book; it will be easy

to supply the connecting links; *the air of verity is the thing that cannot be acquired when it is not present in the first outflow,* and the happiest imagination does not take its place."

Madame d'Épinay follows her friend's advice rather closely. She does not run after imagination, which in truth is not her forte. There is no air of pretension, no positiveness apparent in her narrative. Only in a few passages, when she is pleased to indulge in pure sentiment, when she tries to exalt her style, does she fall in some slight degree into declamation and invocation, which is permitted only to Jean-Jacques; but everywhere else we find familiar letters, earnest, natural, dramatic conversations, reproduced with an appearance of absolute verity. Grimm must have been satisfied.

However, the bulky romance which Madame d'Épinay left to him was never published by him, and it was in danger of remaining unknown for ever when it fell into the hands of that scholarly publisher, M. Brunet, who was able to discover behind the masks of the characters all the interesting historical material which it contained. The principal names were supplied without question; digressions and superfluous passages were omitted, and the three volumes prepared which appeared in 1818, and which proved so popular that there were three editions in less than six months.

In the present condition of the work, the novel

form is hardly perceptible; it is of no importance except in one point: it is an imaginary guardian,—Madame d'Épinay's guardian,—who is supposed to tell the story of his ward, but who generally does it by yielding the floor to herself and the other characters, whose letters, journals, and conversations he quotes at length. This guardian is the machinery of the romance—machinery too perceptible, too unskilfully concealed, to endanger the reality of the whole work. Strike out the fictitious guardian and all the rest is true.

Mademoiselle Louise-Florence-Pétronille Tardieu d'Esclavelles, who, in the romance, calls herself by the pretty name of Émilie, was the daughter of an officer who died in the king's service, and was born about 1725. At the age of twenty, on December 23, 1745, she married her cousin, M. d'Épinay, the oldest son of M. de La Live de Bellegarde, farmer-general. Her husband and she believed themselves to be very deeply in love with each other at first, but the illusion lasted only a short time; she alone loved, and that with the first love of a boarding-school miss. As for him, he was simply a man of pleasure, a dissipated spendthrift, abominably indelicate in all his conduct toward his young wife; he treated her in such wise that it is impossible to go into details here, and we must refer the reader to what she herself says about it.[1]

[1] Somebody asked Diderot what sort of man M. d'Épinay was: "He is a man," was the reply, "who has spent two millions without making a *bon mot* or doing a good deed (*bonne action*).

At this time Madame d'Épinay was a clever, pretty young woman, "impressible and interesting," as was said. Nature had made her very shy, and it was long before she freed herself from the influence and promptings of others—before she was herself. Three portraits might be drawn of Madame d'Épinay: one at twenty years of age, another at thirty (she has drawn this one for us, about the time that she began to know Grimm); and a third after a few years of that acquaintance, when, thanks to him, she had acquired more confidence in herself, and when, being still a most attractive person, she was becoming a woman of real merit, which she eventually became altogether.

At twenty she was ardent, emotional, trustful, and slightly credulous, affectionate, with a pure and modest brow, hair well placed about it, a freshness of colouring which soon vanished, and with tears of emotion ready to suffuse her lovely eyes.

At thirty she herself tells us:

"I am not pretty, and yet I am not ugly. I am short, thin, with a very good figure. I have an air of youth, but without bloom,—a noble, gentle, ardent, intellectual and interesting air. My wit is slow, impartial, deliberate, and inconsequent. I have in my heart vivacity, courage, firmness, elevation of sentiment, and extreme shyness.

"I am genuine but not unreserved. [*The remark is Rousseau's, who had made it to her in person.*] My shyness has often given me the appearance of dissimulation and insincerity; but I have always had the courage to acknowledge my weakness, in order to demolish the suspicion of a vice which I had not.

"I have shrewdness enough to attain my end and to put aside obstacles; but I have none to detect the plans of other people.

"I was born affectionate and sensitive, constant and not coquettish.

"I love retirement, the simple, private life; however, I have almost always led a life opposed to my tastes.

"Ill health, and keen and repeated disappointments, have transformed my naturally cheerful disposition into one of great gravity.

"It is hardly a year since I began to know myself well."

Rousseau speaks of her in his *Confessions* with much injustice, even in respect to the matter of beauty; he insists upon certain points, essential in his judgment, which, he claims, were lacking in Madame d'Épinay; in short, he speaks of her as a lover might to whom she would not listen. Diderot is more just, and he describes Madame d'Épinay in charming fashion at that age of second youth, one day when he was at La Chevrette, while he and she were having their portraits painted.

"Madame d'Épinay is being painted sitting opposite me," he writes to Mademoiselle Voland; "she is leaning on a table, with her arms loosely folded and her head turned a little as if she were looking to one side; her long black hair is held in place by a ribbon that encircles her brow. A few locks have escaped beneath the ribbon; some are falling over her neck, others over her shoulders, and heighten its whiteness. Her costume is simple and *négligé*."

And recurring to the same portrait a few days later, he says, still with a charming turn of phrase:

"Madame d'Épinay's portrait is finished; she is represented with her breast half uncovered; a stray lock or two scattered about her neck and shoulders, the rest held in place by a blue ribbon which encircles her brow; her lips are parted, she is breathing, and her eyes are heavy with languor. She is the image of tenderness and sensuality."

Behold her, then, at thirty years past, flattered a little, if you choose, or at least viewed by friendly eyes, on a beautiful day of sunshine. What she was in those same years of plenitude and decline, but on a day of illness and suffering, we will let, not Diderot, nor Jean-Jacques, but Voltaire tell us. She went to see him during a trip that she took to Geneva for her health. Her frail machine was already in a fair way to break down and go to pieces. Voltaire, however, who looked especially to the mind, to the general appearance, and who, in respect to women, was less material than Rousseau, found her much to his liking. He was more amiable with her, more lively and more extravagant than he was at fifteen; he made her all sorts of declarations, the most amusing that can be imagined. One day when she was writing at his house to her friend Grimm, he insisted on remaining in the room while she composed her letter.

"He expressed a desire to stay so that he could see what my two big black eyes say when I am writing. He has seated himself in front of me, and is poking the fire and joking; he says that I am making fun of him and that I look as if I were criticising him. I tell him that I am writing everything that he says, because it is worth quite as much as all my thoughts."

Voltaire said of her to Doctor Tronchin:

"Your patient is truly philosophical; she has discovered the great art of putting the best possible face on her condition; I would like to be her pupil; but the ply is made. What am I to do? Ah! my philosopher! she is an eagle in a cage of gauze. If I were not dying," he added looking at her, "I would have said all this to you in verse."

With all due allowance for gallantry and poetic verbiage, that "eagle in a cage of gauze" proves at least that Madame d'Épinay had fine eyes, and a very warm heart in its transparent envelope.

I have chosen to describe her, first of all, with the pen of the eminent men whose names are connected with hers; it is well to know people by sight before listening to their romance or their history. Madame d'Épinay's romance is decidedly involved, although it resembles those of many women. She was in the mood to love her husband, when she discovered by signs that were too unequivocal that he was by no means a lovable person and was even contemptible. She had just become a mother; but maternal affection, although in her case it was a very active sentiment, was not enough for her. She strove to make her conjugal duties a law; she suffered, she mused, she had tears in her eyes for she knew not what, when on a day she received a visit from M. de Francueil, an agreeable young man, of refined manners, powdered as fashion required, fond of music like herself—the type of a first lover of the day. She was touched, she fought against the feeling, but she recurred to it. She did not lack the advice of kindly souls.

Among the kindly souls whom she had about her there was one who was assuredly the slyest insect, the most treacherous and cunning confidante that one can imagine. She was a Mademoiselle d'Ette, a maiden of more than thirty years, "once as beautiful

as an angel and with nothing left save the craft of a demon." But such a demon! Diderot, who paints in the style of Rubens, said of her: "She is a Fleming, and that is evident from her skin and her colouring. Her face is like a great pan of milk on which some one has thrown rose-leaves." I omit the rest of Diderot's description. This Mademoiselle d'Ette, who was the Chevalier de Valory's mistress, is introduced to Madame d'Épinay; she worms herself into her confidence, gives her bold, positive, selfish advice. The shrewd, crafty creature has remarked Francueil's love and thinks that she can detect that it is returned; she tries to learn all about it, to assist it, to have a hand in it, to make herself useful and necessary, and all to her own advantage. She claims to have become the mistress of that wealthy household, to hold the key to all its secrets, and to make twofold use of them at need.

This character of Mademoiselle d'Ette is admirably grasped and described; it is by virtue of the depiction of character, the coherence and naturalness of the conversations reported, that Madame d'Épinay's *Mémoires* is a unique book. The amorous Francueil, and later the amorous Grimm, resemble all lovers more or less, —the former, the lover of one's first youth, the latter, him of one's second youth, who is less handsome, less seductive, less fascinating, but often more reliable, and who heals the wounds left by the first.

This part of Madame d'Épinay's *Mémoires* is true,

but is not otherwise original. Their peculiar originality consists in the candid and absolutely lifelike delineation of the characters of other people; in the description of Mademoiselle d'Ette, that domestic pest; in that of Duclos, her worthy pendant, as he reveals himself in these pages; in the confidences of Madame de Jully, who bluntly avows to her sister-in-law her love for the singer Jelyotte and asks service for service. This originality is even more apparent in the scenes at the two dinner-parties at Mademoiselle Quinault's, in the inconceivable orgies of conversation which are indulged in there by the *beaux-esprits,* Madame d'Épinay being present as an eye-witness, who says her little word, and who, above all, knows how to listen. By virtue of this quality Madame d'Épinay, whose purpose was simply to write a romance, has proved to be the authentic chronicler of the manners of her age. Her book belongs between that of Duclos, *Les Confessions du Conte de* ——, and that of Laclos, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses;* but it has more of the atmosphere of the time than either of the others, and it gives us a more lifelike and more complete picture of it, and one which expresses more truly, if I may use the phrase, its average corruption.

In the eighteenth century the type of this feminine corruption, respectable in outward appearance, is presented to us in the person of Mademoiselle d'Ette.

All the scenes in which she appears are excellent and drawn from nature; but the first, in which she

extorts the young woman's secret, and incites her to go farther, surpasses all the others. The precise situation is this: young Émilie, just up from her lying-in, grieving over her husband's infidelities, already despising him, and with perfect justice, has met the attractive Francueil and feels a vague interest in him, but dares not declare herself as yet, and sees her desire only through a mist. At this juncture the obsequious and insidious counsellor appears.

"Mademoiselle d'Ette came to pass the day with me," writes Émilie. "After dinner I lay in my long chair; I had a feeling of heaviness, of ennui; I yawned constantly, and fearing that she might think that her presence incommoded me or was disagreeable to me, I pretended to be sleepy, hoping that my indisposition would finally pass away. But no, it grew worse; melancholy took possession of me and I felt that I must admit that I was depressed. Tears came to my eyes, I could stand it no longer."

In this state of vague discomfort and languor, the young woman apologises to her friend:

"'I believe that it is the vapours; I feel very uncomfortable.'

"'Don't stand on ceremony,' she replied. 'Yes, you certainly have the vapours, and to-day is not the first time; but I have been careful not to say anything about it to you, for I should have added to your trouble.'"

And after a little dissertation upon the vapours and their effect, she said:

"'Let us come to the cause of yours. Come, be honest, don't conceal anything from me; it is ennui, and nothing else.'"

And as the young woman attempted to enter into some explanation,

"'Oh, yes!' Mademoiselle d'Ette interrupted, 'all this confirms me in what I tell you; for it is ennui of the heart that I suspect in your case, not of the mind.' Seeing that I did not reply, she added: 'Yes, your heart is solitary; it no longer cares for anything; you no longer love your husband, you cannot love him.' I attempted to make a gesture of denial, but she continued in a tone which imposed silence on me: 'No, you cannot love him, for you no longer esteem him.' I felt relieved because she had said the words that I dared not utter. I burst into tears. 'Weep freely,' she said, throwing her arms about me; 'tell me all that is going on in that pretty head. I am your friend and will be all my life; keep nothing from me of what you have in your heart; may I be fortunate enough to console you! But first of all let me know what you are thinking about, and what your ideas are concerning your situation.' 'Alas!' I replied, 'I don't know myself what I am thinking about.'"

And the young woman lays bare the conflicting sentiments of her own heart: that she has for a long time believed herself to be severed from her husband and indifferent to him, and yet that she cannot think of him without shedding tears, and that at times she dreads his return almost as if she hated him.

"'Ah, yes!' replied Mademoiselle d'Ette, laughing, 'one hates only as much as one loves. Your hatred is nothing more than love humiliated and disgusted; you will never be cured of this deplorable disease except by loving some object more worthy of you.'—'Oh! never! never!' I cried, drawing away from her arms, as if I dreaded to see her opinion verified. 'I shall love none but M. d'Épinay.'—'You will love other men,' she said, still holding me, 'and you will do well; only find some one who is attractive enough to please you, and'—'In the first place,' said I, 'that is what I shall never find. I swear to you in all sincerity that never since I was born have I seen any other man than my husband who seemed to me worthy to be distinguished.'—'I can well believe it,' she rejoined; 'you have never known anybody but old dotards and coxcombs; it is not much to be wondered at that no one has ever succeeded in attracting you. In all those who come to your house, I do not know a single person who is capable of making a sensible woman happy. A man of about thirty,

past the age of folly, is what I should prefer; a man in a position to advise you, to guide you, and with sufficient affection for you to have no other aim than to make you happy.'—'Yes,' I replied, 'that would be delightful; but where does one find a man of intelligence, agreeable,—in short, such a man as you describe,—who will sacrifice himself for one and be content to be a friend without carrying his pretensions to the point of seeking to be a lover?'—'Why, I do not expect that, either,' replied Mademoiselle d'Ette; 'I propose, in his behalf, that he shall be your lover.'

"My first impulse was to be shocked, the second to be very glad that an unmarried woman of good reputation, like Mademoiselle d'Ette, could think that one might have a lover without committing a crime; not that I felt any inclination to follow her advice, *far from it,* but at all events I need no longer in her presence appear so distressed by my husband's indifference."

And the scene continues in this vein, Madame d'Épinay vowing that she will never have a lover, yet flattered that the other should discuss the subject with her, and, in effect, having one already; and Mademoiselle d'Ette, in order to make her speak and to obtain the mastery over her, applying herself skilfully to the task of inciting, frightening, reassuring, and emboldening that youthful heart, and of bending it toward the ends at which she is aiming. Mademoiselle d'Ette's favourite maxim, which is that of the whole eighteenth century as well, is: "Only a woman's inconstancy in her tastes, or a bad choice, or the publicity that she gives to it, can injure her reputation. *The essential thing is the choice.*" And as for what the world may say, what does it matter? "People will talk about it for a week; or perhaps not at all; and then they will think no more about it unless it be to say: 'She was right.'"

Madame d'Épinay's choice was already made at that time more definitely than she dared acknowledge to Mademoiselle d'Ette, for an instinctive sense of delicacy warned her that she must conceal something from that pretended friend, who placed her hand so boldly on these incipient and timid sentiments.

The sequel is varied with incidents of which I can mention only a few. Francueil at first appears in a flattering light: the love between him and Madame d'Épinay is genuine love *à la française,* of the sort that may exist in a polished, refined society,—a love devoid of violent tempests and of thunderbolts, of fits of frenzy *à la Phèdre* and *à la Lespinasse,* but with youth and affection and charm. They act in theatricals with wild enthusiasm; but the theatricals are only a pretext for isolating themselves, for being together constantly. "The people here are a flock of lovers," Mademoiselle d'Ette writes to her chevalier. "Upon my word, this company is like a living novel. Francueil and the little woman are as intoxicated as they were the first day."

But intoxication has its limits. Francueil grows cold, or, rather, he wanders from the fold; he goes to supper-parties, he gets intoxicated in good earnest, he is no longer so punctual or so attentive to his friend; the bad manners of the time have infected him. Then it is that Duclos tries to supplant him and to invade the citadel in his place. He despised Francueil, whom he considered a man of small brains,

and whom he always called the cockchafer. "You are not happy, poor woman!" he cries, "and it is your own fault. *Mordieu!* why attach yourself to the leg of a cockchafer? You were deceived; La d'Ette is a hussy, I have always told you."

Older by at least twenty years than Madame d'Épinay, Duclos, caustic and bitter, carrying frankness to the point of brutality, and employing his brutality with rare adroitness, was very ready to make up to that clever, playful, and vivacious young woman; he passed all his evenings at her house, and thought that he did her honour by acquiring influence over her and training her. His whole plan is set forth in Madame d'Épinay's *Mémoires,* in his own words to her, with a brusque and picturesque crudity which she may have exaggerated sometimes, but which she certainly did not invent; a sweet and refined woman is incapable of inventing such manners and such remarks if she has not actually experienced them. Before the publication of these *Mémoires* Duclos enjoyed a good reputation, that of a man of original disposition and character, free of speech,—straightforward and adroit [*droit et adroit*]. Henceforth his name will convey only the idea of a dangerous friend, a sneering despot, cynical, and deceptively gruff. Whatever any one may say or do, the false *bonhomme* in him is unmasked, he will never be rehabilitated.

However, if he is the loser in respect to character, he loses nothing intellectually. The conversations re-

ported by Madame d'Épinay in which he took part are most comical and entertaining, seasoned with the most piquant of spices, and coloured with a Breton *verve* which is not apparent in the same degree in any of his writings. The best scene, and one of the most respectable, in which he figures, is that in which he goes one day to the college with Madame d'Épinay, and subjects to an inquisitorial examination the tutor of young d'Épinay, that poor and grotesque M. Linant, of whom it is said in one place: "The poor man is more stupid than ever." While Duclos sends the child to write a theme in an adjoining room, he takes the tutor aside and puts him to the question in a most entertaining way—in a most sensible way, I would say, except that it was humiliating and far too harsh. For we must not forget that in the midst of these memoirs, amid the medley of gallantries and love intrigues which fill them and in which the principal character is painted at more than half-length, the prepossession, I had almost said the chimera, of a systematic moral education occupies a large place, and in the vicissitudes of her two affectionate foibles, Émilie is constantly in competition with the author of *Émile*.

There was one critical moment in the life of poor Madame d'Épinay, when her reputation was subjected to a terrible attack. It was at the death of Madame de Jully, her sister-in-law, a charming woman who, beneath her affectation of indolence, was herself imbued

with the philosophy of the age in all its essence, and practised it in all its audacity and charm. Taken away suddenly, in her prime, she had barely time, as she breathed her last, to intrust a key to Madame d'Épinay; it was the key of a secretary which contained letters to be destroyed. Madame d'Épinay, who was apprised of everything, understood and instantly carried out her wish. But an important paper, bearing upon certain matters in which her husband and M. de Jully were interested, not being found at once, she was suspected of having burned it with the other papers, the ashes of which were found in the fireplace, and odious reports, sanctioned by the family itself, gained currency. These reports acquired such consistency in society that one day, at a supper-party given by the Comte de Friesen, Grimm, who had known Madame d'Épinay only a short time, felt called upon to defend her openly, and provoked a duel in which he was slightly wounded. This was beginning like a *preux chevalier*, and Madame d'Épinay, in her gratitude, gave him that title and accepted him as such.

It was high time: in the clutches of the detestable Mademoiselle d'Ette, of the unworthy Duclos, of a husband who was more extravagant than ever, and who was involving Francueil in his dissipated and extravagant courses, Madame d'Épinay was fighting against too great odds, and her frail constitution was on the point of giving way. For a moment she had the idea of a religious life and of taking God as a

makeshift; but an excellent ecclesiastic whom she introduces, and whom she represents as speaking very sagely, had no difficulty in proving to her that she misinterpreted her own heart. It was to Grimm that the task fell of setting her right and of curing her. Let us say to his honour that he applied all his energies to it, and that he succeeded.

Grimm loved Madame d'Épinay, and he was from the first useful to her as a guide. She had the good sense to form her judgment of him at once from that essential quality, and to realise that she had gained a genuine friend. In the early days of their intimacy she writes: "We talked till midnight. I am filled with esteem and affection for him. His ideas are so just! His advice is so impartial!" Thus we find the critic with all his merits even in the lover. He was immeasurably kind and helpful to her; he first gave her confidence in herself, a realisation of her own worth; he set her free. "Oh! how happily endowed you are by nature!" he wrote to her. "In Heaven's name, do not be false to your vocation; it depends only on yourself to be the happiest and most adorable creature on earth, provided that you no longer set others' opinions above your own, and that you learn to be sufficient unto yourself." And when he is not speaking to her, with what just appreciation he still speaks of her, emphasised and quickened by affection! "*Bon Dieu!*" he writes to Diderot, "how that woman is to be pitied! I should not be troubled about her, if

she were as strong as she is courageous. She is gentle and confiding; she is placid and loves repose above everything; but her situation constantly demands unnatural conduct. entirely foreign to her nature; nothing so wears out and destroys a person as a naturally frail organism."

Only after she knew Grimm did Madame d'Épinay became her real self. Through him that mind, instinct with grace and refinement, acquired its true temper; he liberated and gave its value to the trait which particularly distinguished her,—"a delicate and profound uprightness of sentiment." Madame d'Épinay, compromised as she was by the incidents of her early life, and slandered by her former friends, was on the way to become a better woman at the very time when she was being painted in the darkest colours; and she was able to reply one day, in a strain no less witty than touching, to a man from Paris who called upon her at Geneva, and who rather awkwardly showed to her face his surprise at finding her so different from the conception of her that people had chosen to give him : "Understand, monsieur, that I am not so good as my Geneva reputation, but better than my Paris reputation."

Grimm was thirty-three years old when he first knew Madame d'Épinay, and during the twenty-seven years that their liaison lasted, his attachment did not waver for a single day. After a certain time, however, he found himself imperceptibly more attracted

by literature, by the labours and duties imposed upon him by honourable obligations, and by the ambition natural to one of mature years. That judicious person felt that he must seek new motives for living as he lost his youth. He advised his friend on the same theory. When he left Paris it was she who held the pen in his place, and, under the guidance of Diderot, carried on his literary correspondence with the sovereigns of the North. She wrote books, which did not interfere with her making knots, tapestry, and songs. "Go on with your work," Abbé Galiani wrote to her; "it is a proof of attachment to life to compose books."

With enfeebled body and ruined health she had the talent to live thus to the end, to dispute foot by foot what was left of her distressing existence, and to make the best of it, with affection and rare charm, for the benefit of those about her.

She died April 17, 1783, at the age of fifty-eight. We find her and all her circle, during the last four years of her life, depicted in her correspondence with Abbé Galiani, which would be well worth the trouble of an examination by itself. My only purpose at this time is to dwell upon these interesting and almost ingenuous memoirs of an epoch of sophistry, this curious monument of the morals of a century, and also to recall attention to a woman of whom we may say, in her praise, that in all her failings, as in all her good qualities, she was and always remained a true woman; and they are becoming rare.

Buffon.

1707–1788.

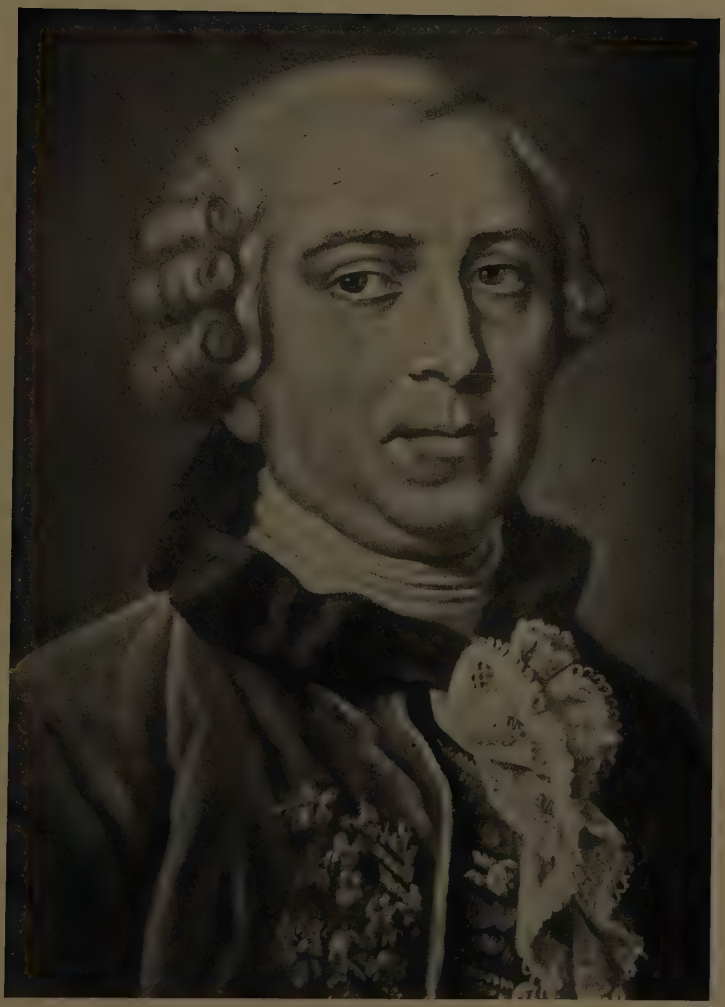
Buffon.

BUFFON, the last to disappear of the four great men[1] of the eighteenth century, closed that century, so to speak, on the day of his death, April 16, 1788. Born at Montbar in Bourgogne, in September, 1707, he was five years older than Jean-Jacques Rousseau; he was thirteen years younger than Voltaire and eighteen younger than Montesquieu. His father, M. Le Clerc, was counsellor in the Parliament of Dijon, which then contained many studious and learned men, many a one of good stock in whom the old sap had not run dry. Buffon, however, used to say that he took especially after his mother, of whom he always spoke affectionately and with pleasure. He was educated at the Collége of Dijon, and displayed at the outset a great inclination for work and for amusement. Nature had given him all the advantages of face, figure, bearing, and strength, and an intense ardour in every direction, which good sense and will finally succeeded in mastering. "The body of an athlete and the mind of a sage"; thus Voltaire described him later, in his hours of justice and fair dealing.

[1][Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, Buffon.—Tr.]

Buffon, however, became a philosopher and sage only by degrees. His youth seems to have been decidedly tempestuous and boisterous; but, no matter how he had employed his evening, he always ordered that he be roused at a stated hour in the morning, to apply himself to his studies. Geometry had deeply interested him from his school-days, and from the zeal with which he applied himself to it, it seemed almost to be his vocation. It may more properly be said that, in his soaring and unbounded curiosity, he cultivated all branches of knowledge simultaneously, from his early youth. "He was not willing that anybody else should understand what he did not understand himself"; he would have felt humiliated as a man to have it so, and that noble pride, upheld by an obstinate will and served by an admirable intelligence, carried him to the very summit of the sublime sciences. Nature perfected all these gifts by clothing them with eloquence.

As a young man he became intimate with the tutor of a young English nobleman who was living at Dijon, and that intimacy led him to make a journey to Italy, and another to England; these are the only journeys that he ever made. That man who had covered such vast spaces and so many epochs, and had described so many living forms, was able to say: "I have passed fifty years at my desk." Buffon was short-sighted; that was his only infirmity. On that account he developed the more thoroughly his power to see every-



COMTE DE BUFFON.

From an old painting.

thing with the eyes of the mind, to form a mental image of everything by means of absorbed meditation.

This early intimacy with an Englishman was very useful to Buffon; it put him in the way of being informed betimes of every great scientific discovery in England. He entered without hesitation into the theory of Newton and that of the great physicists of his school. His first published works were two translations from the English. He translated Hales's "Vegetable Statics (1735), and Newton's "Method of Fluxions and Infinite Results" (1740). In his preface to this last he expresses himself like one who is altogether master of his subject, and sets forth in a succinct, superior, and almost entertaining way, the disputes that had arisen apropos of the invention of this method of reckoning infinity. In the preface to his translation of Hales, he extols the experimental method in physics and declaims against "systems" so earnestly that we wonder whether he can be the man who is destined to construct such excellent systems.

"The system of nature," he says, "depends, it may be, upon several principles; these principles are unknown to us, and their combination no less so. How dare we flatter ourselves that we can unveil these mysteries with no other guide than our imagination? and how do we make out to forget that the effect is the only means of ascertaining the cause? It is only by subtle, well-considered and persistent experiments that we can force Nature to disclose her secret to us; no other method has ever succeeded, and true physicists cannot help looking on the old systems as old-fashioned visions, and are reduced to reading most of the new ones as one reads novels. Collections of experiments and observations are therefore the only books capable of adding to our knowledge."

This first Buffon, at once geometrician and experimenter, gave no promise as yet of what the second Buffon would be—a bold generaliser, by no means eager to subordinate facts to ideas. Every one knows the reply that he made one day to the chemist, Guyton de Morveau, who wanted to subject a body to the crucible in order to make sure of the fact which Buffon deduced from some theory: "The best crucible is the mind," said Buffon. A decidedly risky remark when it is a question of pronouncing upon the works of nature!

But the explanation is that there was in Buffon a genius which was soon to set itself free and to demand satisfaction in its turn. At the beginning of the twelfth volume of his *Histoire Naturelle,* he avows with a sort of artless candour that imperious craving of his nature which beseeches him to introduce in his history some general dissertation wherein he can develope his theories, treat nature on a large scale, and compensate himself for the tedium of the details. "Then we shall return to our details with better courage," he says, "for I confess that one requires courage to devote one's energies constantly to little objects the examination of which demands the most apathetic patience, and gives genius no chance."

Appointed in 1739 superintendent of the Jardin-du-Roi, and in the same year an associate of the Académie des Sciences, Buffon was as yet known only by one of the translations that I have mentioned, and by a

number of memoirs on certain special subjects. It was then that he conceived the plan of turning his positition in the Jardin-du-Roi to the very best account and of becoming the historian of nature. He was thirty-two years old.

The title "Natural History" was a little vague at that time. It was so to Buffon, who, viewing his subject in its most general aspect, proposed to try to define it, but only on condition of never limiting it. After ten years of preliminary labour, during which he had taken Daubenton as a collaborator for the descriptive and anatomical part of the work, he published in 1749 the first quarto volumes of his *Histoire Naturelle*. It was one of the events of the century. From that time the successive volumes of that monumental work continued to be published regularly until the author's death (1749–1788). A serious illness, which interrupted his labours for nearly two years, caused no appreciable delay in publication. During the execution of this long undertaking Buffon took on several collaborators. When Daubenton, the man of the scalpel, left him, he left a great, an irreparable void; his place was never filled. But so far as literary collaborators are concerned, Buffon was well supplied with them, and he had at hand his descriptive school in the Gueneaus de Montbelliard, husband and wife, and Abbé Bexon. M. Flourens, the editor of Buffon's works, and the correspondence published in 1860, afford us some interesting information on this subject.

Beware of admiring too warmly the "Birds" in Buffon's work; do not be led into exclaiming that the great delineator never wrote anything finer; a most amusing error! You would, in that case, do just what all Paris did when it complimented M. de Chateaubriand on an unsigned article which was attributed to him, and which was written by M. de Salvaudy. For the "Birds" are by another pen than Buffon's; the "Peacock" is Gueneau's, and the "Nightingale"; the "Swan," that much-belauded "Swan," may well be pure Bexon; it is certain that the little abbé did a good deal to it before it passed under the hand of the master, who simply gave it the final polish. We have the documentary evidence, the canvas in manuscript (not of the *Swan*, but of the other birds); we have the rough drafts; the emendations can be counted and measured.

But all the greatest and most important portions of the work are Buffon's; each volume bears his stamp and his imprint by virtue of some immortal page; the last volumes are not to be distinguished from the earlier ones, and are especially noteworthy only by reason of their more exact arrangement. The one containing *Les Époques de la Nature,* published in 1778, is considered to be Buffon's masterpiece.

His life did not vary during these fifty years of toil. Each year he passed a few months in Paris to fulfil the duties and obligations of his post, to attend to the interests of the institution over which he pre-

sided, and which, thanks to him, became of greater importance every day. Then he returned to Montbar, where he lived the greater part of the year, engrossed in study and composition. He has often been represented in that rural and feudal abode, in his tower, where he shut himself up in the morning, to meditate and to write. I regret that in some of our French writers more or less inclination to jest is mingled with the sentiment of respect and veneration which such an existence ought to inspire above all else. Amid the tumultuous, dissipated, and agitated life of the eighteenth century, Buffon stands alone; he finds in the strength of his character, in his exalted love of glory, and in the powerful interest of the boundless studies to which he has consecrated himself, the means of resisting all the allurements, all the paltry temptations of his surroundings. Observe how all yield to them more or less and succumb, except him; I say all, and I am speaking of the greatest. Voltaire, as is only too well known, lives on nothing but battles and quarrels; poor Jean-Jacques is at death's door with them for twenty years, and his brain goes astray by dint of trying to reply to unkind remarks and to slanders. Even Montesquieu does not retain his tranquillity if any one takes him to task. His *Esprit des Lois* appeared at the same time with Buffon's first volumes. The Jansenist Gazetier attacked the two works sharply, and Montesquieu even more violently than Buffon. Instantly Montesquieu took up the pen. "He has

replied by quite a thick pamphlet in his best style," Buffon wrote to a friend (March 21, 1750); "his reply has been perfectly successful. Despite his example, I think that I shall take a different course and shall not answer a single word. Every one has his own refinements of self-esteem; mine goes so far as to believe that certain people cannot even insult me." [1] Such was constantly the principle on which Buffon acted—to allow calumny to react upon itself. And twenty-eight years later, when he recurred to the same subject of attack, upon resuming in his *Époques de la Nature* this same general system of ideas and of work,

"Let us try, nevertheless," he said, "to make the truth more palpable; let us increase the number of probabilities; let us make the verisimilitude greater; let us heap knowledge upon knowledge by assembling facts, by accumulating proofs; and then let us pass judgment without anxiety and without appeal; for I have always thought that a man who writes should give his attention solely to his subject and in no wise to himself; that it is unbecoming to try to interest others in himself, and that, consequently, personal criticisms should be left unanswered."

This lofty sense of personal dignity governs Buffon's whole life. He never allowed himself to be turned

[1] Letter to Abbé Le Blanc in the *Mélanges de la Société des Bibliophiles*, 1822.—The articles in question may be read in the *Nouvelles Ecclésiastiques*, a Jansenist sheet, in the issues of February 6 and 13, 1750; they were a formal denunciation of the book and led the Sorbonne to censure it. (See the same sheet for June 26, 1754.) Amid a multitude of narrow views and bitter sneers, there is one point in which the critic is not mistaken, and that is the non-Christian tendency of Buffon's book. As I have remarked elsewhere (*Port Royal*, iii., p. 332), Pascal's greatest adversary in the eighteenth century, his most eminent refuter (although he does not seem to be so) is Buffon,

aside or diverted a single day from this contemplation and description of nature, for which the longest mortal existence was still too brief. Let us consider him as he was at Montbar, but let us not enter, as Hérault-Séchelles did, as a frivolous, disloyal, and mocking spy; let us enter rather with that exalted and reverential feeling which led Jean-Jacques, when he passed through Montbar in 1770, to express a wish to see that study which has been called the cradle of natural history, and to kiss the threshold on his knees.

The pavilion in which Buffon worked was at the farther end of his gardens, and it was reached by going up from terrace to terrace. He went thither every morning at six o'clock. In midsummer he worked in a very lofty study, the arched ceiling of which resembled those of churches and ancient chapels. "M. de Buffon," said Madame Necker, "thinks better and more readily in the great elevation of his tower, at Montbar, where the air is purer; that is a remark that he has often made." There, in a bare room, seated at a wooden desk, he meditated and wrote. There were no papers before him, no pile of books; all such display of that erudition and old paper simply embarrassed Buffon. A subject profoundly considered, contemplation, silence, and solitude—these were his materials and his tools. In another room, not quite so high or so cool as the first, where also he sometimes worked, there was no other ornament on the walls than an engraving of Newton, the great interpreter of nature.

Some one has chosen to make merry over the toilette that Buffon was wont to make before sitting down to write. When he rose each morning he was accustomed to be dressed and to have his hair dressed according to the fashion of the time; he thought that the man's garb formed a part of his personality. Apart from that, everything in his study indicated the utmost simplicity. Hume described the impression that Buffon produced on him by saying that in gait and carriage he corresponded to one's idea of a marshal of France rather than to that of a man of letters. His countenance bore the stamp of the loftiest ideas. "Black eyebrows, shadowing very lively black eyes," stood out even more noticeably beneath his lovely white hair. Elevation of thought, tranquillity, dignity, consciousness of his strength,—these were the characteristics that were manifest in his whole person.

"Buffon lives absolutely as a philosopher," one judicious observer has said; "he is just without being generous, and his whole conduct is founded on common sense. He loves order and enforces it everywhere." With this perfect sense of justice and the kindliness due to a regular life and to his natural disposition, he constantly did good in his neighbourhood, and the people of Montbar adored him.

Such an attitude, so unusual, so unwavering, and so imperturbable, was well adapted to stir up and incite the satirists; Buffon found them even in the camp of the *philosophes*. Voltaire tried sometimes to bite

him and to turn him to ridicule, but was checked by an involuntary sentiment of respect. D'Alembert, with less delicate instincts than Voltaire, and less quick to obey the sentiment of the beautiful, gave himself full licence concerning Buffon. He liked neither his personality nor his talents; he persistently called him "the phrase-maker," "the king of phrase-makers"; he mimicked him (d'Alembert had the unfortunate talent of mimicking people). Buffon was told of it; he was moved to pity to see the great geometrician playing the monkey, and he paid no heed.

The publication of the first three volumes of the *Histoire Naturelle* (1749) made a great sensation and a great noise. There were expressions of admiration, and there were exclamations of dissent. It was not the theologians alone who dissented, but the scientists as well. We have the critical *Observations* which those volumes caused M. de Malesherbes to write. When he entered upon that vast subject, even after ten years of study, Buffon was still not fully prepared. The botanists especially were able to detect him *in flagrante delicto* of inaccuracy, and of carelessness in his manner of passing judgment on Linnæus, whose methods he criticised. Buffon knew little of botany; "I am short-sighted," he said; "I have learned botany three times and forgotten it as many; if I had good eyes, every step that I take would refresh my knowledge in that subject." It seemed that, being built on a large scale by nature, it was hard for him to stoop

to study small things: the cedar of Lebanon he contemplated with pleasure, but the hyssop seemed to him too trivial. Thus it was that he knew nothing about insects and maligned the bees, although Réaumur had already appeared. It required all the charms and prettiness of the humming-bird to reconcile him to the tiny creature. When he speaks of animals, it is always of those animals that are more or less analogous to man, vertebrates of the higher order. In his *Histoire Naturelle,* he conceives at first no other method than that which consists in treating creatures according to their relations to man in respect to proximity and utility. He imagines a man wholly unlearned and without any ideas, in a field where the animals, fishes, birds, plants, and stones appear, one after another, before his eyes. After the preliminary straightening out of things, this man will distinguish animate matter from inanimate. Having reached this first great division, *animal, vegetable,* and *mineral,* he will go on to distinguish animals that live on *land* from those that live in the *water,* or those that fly through the *air.*

"Then let us put ourselves in this man's place," says Buffon, "or let us suppose that he has acquired as much knowledge or had as much experience as we have: he will proceed to judge the objects of natural history by their relations to him: those that are the most *necessary,* the most *useful,* to him, will hold the first place; for instance, among animals he will give preference to the horse, the dog, the ox, etc. Then he will turn his attention to those which, while they are not domesticated, always live in the same regions, the same climate, as stags, hares, etc."

In this arrangement, then, which he calls the most natural of all, and which is only provisional, Buffon proceeds, in the first place, to classify animals and other living things solely according to their degree of *utility* to man, and not according to the essential characteristics which distinguish them and which may bring together some that appear to be very far apart. To conclude upon this branch of the subject, I will say that it was only after a considerable number of volumes had appeared that Buffon, learning gradually by practical experience and by Daubenton's supplementary descriptions, finally prepared classifications more in accordance with the facts and based upon comparative observation of the creatures among themselves. His professional brethren observed his progress in this direction in his work on the gazelles, published in 1764 (volume xii), and above all in his nomenclature of the monkeys (volumes xiv and xv, 1766 and 1767).

But if this detail and this scientific method left much to be desired in Buffon for a long while, in the view of a small number of advanced observers, he impressed men's minds at the very beginning by his broad views, the broadest that can be suggested for the meditation of the natural philosopher. In a discourse on the theory of the earth, he sought to determine, first of all, the structure and method of formation of this terrestrial globe, the stage upon which animals live and plants grow; he attempted, in accordance with the important geological facts then known, to establish its

successive revolutions from the beginning to its gradual hardening and its present composition. Thence he passed to certain conjectures concerning the birth and reproduction of living beings. When he came to man, these slightly mystical elucidations were heightened by remarks no less shrewd than judicious concerning the various stages of childhood, puberty, virility, and old age; concerning the acquirements and the sphere of action of the various senses. The third volume was crowned by the well-known admirable passage, in which the first man is described as he may have been on the first day of the Creation; awaking to life an entire stranger to himself and to everything about him, and telling the story of his first thoughts. Here Buffon became the rival of Milton himself, a physicist Milton, minus the piety and adoration. Later, Condillac, seeking to rebuke Buffon and to convict him of inaccuracy, imagined, in his *Traité des Sensations,* that strange statue, which he endowed with life little by little, giving it first one sense, then another. Buffon made much sport of that colourless and frigid statue, and when Condillac came to ask him for his vote for the Académie Française, it is said that he received him with a smile, promised him what he wished, and said as he embraced him: "You have made a statue talk, my dear abbé; I embrace you because you still have some warmth, but, my dear abbé, your statue has none."

The fourth volume of the *Histoire Naturelle* ap-

peared in 1753. Faithful to the method that he had announced, Buffon gave therein the history of the principal domestic animals,—the horse, ass, and ox,—and prefaced it with an excellent discourse on the nature of animals compared with that of man. He represents good triumphing over evil as a general rule, and pleasure over pain, in the physical nature of every sentient being. The thing that disturbs the equilibrium in man is his imagination, which corrupts the good, and, by anticipating evil, often produces it. Buffon would not reduce mankind to the stupid well-being of the animal, but would exalt him, through the reasoning power, to a state of superior felicity. He would convince us that "happiness lies within ourselves; that the peaceful felicity of our heart is our sole genuine blessing." He would turn mankind away from the insane passions which put force upon nature and bring in their train ennui and disgust. From the way in which he speaks of "that horrible disgust with oneself, which leaves one no other desire than that he may cease to exist," we see that, if that placid and superior mind was never afflicted with the malady of the Rousseaus and the Werthers and the Renés of the future, he did not fail to recognise that malady and to denounce it at its fountainhead. "In that state of illusion and of darkness," he says, "we would fain change the very nature of our mind; it was given us only to gain knowledge, and we would employ it only to feel." The really wise man, in his

judgment, is the man who has the power to overcome these false assumptions and false desires.

"Content with his fate, he does not wish to be other than he has always been, to live otherwise than he has always lived; sufficient unto himself, he has but little need of others, he cannot bear to be a burden to them; constantly intent upon employing the powers of his mind, he perfects his understanding, cultivates his intelligence, acquires new knowledge, and satisfies his own needs at every instant, without remorse, without repugnance; he enjoys the whole universe while enjoying himself. Such a man is, beyond doubt, the happiest being in all nature."

Give to this wise man a motive, an additional stimulus, give him "glory, that mighty incentive of all great minds," and you will have Buffon himself,—Buffon, who, in order to describe the noblest type of mankind, had only to grasp its characteristic features in himself. But to all that he says against the passions, we may offer a single suggestion in reply. "But would you yourself," we may say to him, "have escaped that ennui, that listlessness of mind which follows the age of passions, had you not been upheld and possessed by this unwavering passion for renown?"

The point that Buffon was most particular about in writing was continuity, connection between the parts of the discourse, each leading up to the next. He could not endure what was detached and jerky, and that was a fault for which he reproved Montesquieu. He ascribed genius to continuity of thought on the same subject, and he insisted that the words should

flow like a river that spreads out and bathes everything with its ample limpid stream. "He did not put in his works a single word which he could not explain." Clearness no less than continuity was his constant preoccupation. When his secretary was reading his manuscript to him, at the faintest sign of faltering or hesitation he would make a cross, and would return to the passage and correct it until he had made it smooth and luminous. For all that, I do not find in his writings anything novel or any expressions of his invention so terse and vigorous as we might imagine to-day; in that respect Chateaubriand, and even Bernardin de Saint-Pierre left him far behind. There are some delightful examples in Buffon of a new and genuinely original language, but they are rare. His great charm consists rather in the constant flow and the plentitude of the current. His expression, at least, is never marked by that restlessness and writhing which in some other authors accompanies an extreme craving for novelty. In certain bits of description, there are light and charming touches which affect me more than the passages more frequently cited.

There was in Buffon's day a man of his own age, but illustrious before him, a man born a naturalist, as other men are born musicians, painters, or geometricians, a man whose name has become synonymous with that of science itself—the Swede Linnæus. Born in the same year with Buffon (1707), of a family of peasants and country ministers or vicars, he conceived

a fondness for plants while playing in the garden of the paternal parsonage. His father employed his leisure in horticulture, and it is said that Linnæus's mother, during her pregnancy, never lost her interest in her husband's labours. When her child was born, and the moment he began to cry, it sufficed to quiet him, they say, that his mother should put a flower in his little hands ; and she was not surprised. A charming legend of Linnæus's childhood, which recalls the tales of the ancient bucolics concerning young Daphnis. However, Linnæus's youth and his beginnings were arduous in the extreme; he had to triumph over the vexations and obstacles of poverty, as Buffon had to rescue himself from the perils of dissipation and wealth. Linnæus's life, of which he has told more than once himself, is full of artless and innocent details. Betrothed to the daughter of a physician, early in 1735, after assuring himself of the young woman's heart, he started on his travels in foreign lands. He lived at least three years in Holland, then passed some time in Paris, where the Jussieus welcomed him; Buffon had not as yet been heard of. His absence being thus prolonged, Linnæus learned, not without surprise, that a faithless friend was endeavouring to take advantage of it to steal his fiancée's heart. He returned, without undue haste, but still in time to defeat this anti-conjugal scheme, and found the maiden true.

In every respect Linnæus, the man of regularity and

method, a fresh, ingenious, inventive observer, with the eye of a lynx, a concise and eloquent writer, a poet even in his Latin, which was strewn with metaphors and carved into aphorisms,—Linnæus forms an absolute contrast to Buffon, the painter of development and of expansive views, whose sentences, with their numerous distinct members, bound together by flexible punctuation, cannot without difficulty decide to come to an end. In 1748, a year before the publication of the first volume of Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle*, Linnæus, already at the pinnacle of renown, took several hundred pupils into the country about Upsala. "We made frequent excursions in search of plants, insects, and birds. On Wednesday and Saturday of each week we herborised from dawn till dark. The pupils, wearing flowers in their hats, returned to the town and escorted their professor to his garden, preceded by rustic musicians. That was the last degree of magnificence in our pleasant science." Thus Linnæus ; and, by way of contrast, we must once more observe Buffon at Montbar, alone at six o'clock in the morning in summer, going up from terrace to terrace, opening the gates at the foot of each flight of steps, and thus, at a lordly gait, attaining his study at the far end of his gardens, whence he comes forth only to walk slowly about, with his head full of ideas, in the elevated paths, where no one dared disturb him. His thoughts alone served him as escort.

Linnæus and Buffon were rivals; they were even

unjust to each other. Buffon, with superb disdain, attacked Linnæus first, concerning his artificial methods, and even when he had come to acknowledge the necessity of classifications, he never did him full and entire justice. "Buffon, the antagonist of Linnæus," Linnæus himself tells us in his fragmentary memoirs, "was compelled, *nolens volens,* to have the plants in the Jardin-du-Roi arranged according to the sexual system." But Buffon did not give way on this point so readily as Linnæus thought; he never consented, so Blainville tells us, to allow Linnæus's method and nomenclature to enter the Botanical Garden with flags flying; "he simply allowed the names given by Linnæus to be written on the tags used to label the plants, but only on condition (an incredible thing if genius were not human!) that they should be written on the under side." However, Linnæus, who rewarded his friends by giving their names to the prettiest plants, revenged himself innocently enough on his enemies by giving their names to rough or thorny ones. It was said that he had an idea of such reprisals in his mind when he bestowed the name of *Bufonia* on a most unattractive plant; but the accuracy of the fact and the real purpose of the allusion have been contested. "Buffon," said Linnæus, toward the end of his life, "did not extend the boundaries of science, but he knew how to make it popular; and that too is a way of serving it to advantage." To be sure this praise does not go far enough; but let us

at least see therein a sort of reparation accorded by the prince of botanists, by the naturalist who was a naturalist by birth and by pure genius, to him who had become one by force of will, and who also reigned by right of genius and of power.

Buffon, at the beginning, was no more just to Réaumur than to Linnæus. Réaumur held the sceptre of natural history in France when Buffon appeared, and, the better to wrest it from him, Buffon took delight in fighting him, in harassing him even, and in lowering him little by little in public opinion. Buffon, who on account of his defective sight did not use the microscope, so that he did not examine plants closely, was inclined to despise insects. He was amazed at what seemed to him the excessive pains which some naturalists took to describe their habits at such length, and, above all, to arouse admiration of their industry. "For," he said, "a fly ought not to occupy any more room in a naturalist's head than it occupies in nature." It seems that Buffon, confining himself to the point of view of man, and placed between the two infinities, infinite greatness and infinite littleness, was sensible only of the first. He was rather fond of arranging things and creatures in order of height, if one may say so, and of physical size; so it was that he thought it fitting to begin the history of birds with that of the Ostrich, which is the elephant of that order of creatures.

However that may be, he loses no opportunity to criticise Réaumur, both as to the substance and as to

the form of his ideas; he rebukes him for drowning himself in "an immensity of words"; and in truth, compared with Buffon's, Réaumur's style is very diffuse and very prolix; it is perspicuous and natural, however, and when he speaks of the bees he becomes charming. Severe to the point of injustice with these men of positive science, Buffon, who is susceptible to talent, to the imposing, has a much higher regard for a Pliny, "with his proud, melancholy, and sublime intellect"; although he always decries man to exalt nature, he never refers to that ancient writer save in a tone of respect, passing over his numerous failings in silence.

I have seen positive scholars, observers of merit, albeit their horizon was somewhat confined and depressed, who, when they were questioned about Buffon, would scarcely reply; and one of them said to me one day: "There is Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, too, who composed some fine pictures in that style." Evidently these professional scientists, failing to find in Buffon the exact detail of observation which they prize above everything, detecting in his work generalisations or vagueness (which they confuse), having discovered errors therein, and not appreciating the elevation and prime originality of some of his luminous conceptions and his perspectives, are paying him back for the contempt that he felt for their predecessors of the same race; they wreak upon him the vengeance of the positive naturalist, the anatomist, the

observer with the microscope, upon the man of talent who has been too much inclined to keep them at a distance; they are proud because they are more advanced to-day than he was; and by coupling him so closely with Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, whom they read very seldom, they relegate him to a place among the pure men of letters, forgetting that Buffon was a genius capable of a scientific education, which Bernardin de Saint-Pierre never was.

There is another class of scientists, as positive and more philosophical (Cuvier at their head), who seem, on the contrary, to have discovered in Buffon all that is worthy of being praised, and to have taken account of the real progress for which science is indebted to him. I have often talked with modest scholars who cling to this method of observation and experiment, and after each conversation, I have always come away overflowing with respect for Buffon the scientist, to say nothing of that other admiration which one naturally entertains for the painter and the writer.

As I have already said, Buffon's most perfect work is his discourse or tableau of the *Époques de la Nature*, which he published in 1778, at the age of seventy-one, and which he had had copied, we are assured, *as many as eighteen times* (strike off as many as you please) before he brought it to the degree of perfection which satisfied him. He recurred then to the ideas of his first volume on the theory of the earth, and presented

them in a more complete light and in new combinations—I dare not say with more verisimilitude. For this is the way in which Buffon corrected his work: in the amplitude of his style, he was opposed to revision; like a great artist, he deemed it the simpler way, when a work was once published, to correct his errors in a new work, a new picture, by beginning entirely anew, as Nature does. In the *Époques* he narrates and describes in seven tableaux the revolutions of the terrestrial globe from the time when he assumes it to have been in a fluid state, down to the time when man appears, to reign. Buffon does not put forward his hypothesis as actual fact, but simply as a means of imagining what was likely to have taken place, in a manner bearing more or less analogy to the fact, and of fixing one's ideas upon the most important subjects of natural philosophy. This precaution once taken, he describes with a continuity, a precision, and a sense of reality which surprise us and create an illusion at the same time, those immense and terrifying scenes of disentanglement, those awe-inspiring spectacles which had no human witness.

It is said that Buffon was very fond of the English novelist Richardson, "because of his great truth, and because he had seen at close quarters all the objects that he described." We might apply the same praise to him apropos of the *Époques de la Nature;* he knows and sees those things that happened before the creation of man, because he has examined them at

close quarters. In truth Richardson is no more familiar with the domestic life of the Harlowe family than Buffon seems to be with those for ever unknown and vanished epochs which he brings before our eyes, that internal life of the universe to which he introduces us. Never, in all that vast field of circumstantial details, does the smile of doubt play about his lips. He treats that sublime romance with the finished precision which he would have employed in a description of real, existing nature. "Where were you," said God to Job, "when I laid the foundations of the earth?" M. de Buffon seems to say to us without excitement: "*I was there!*" He exalts the mind, he dignifies it, disturbs it, and confounds it as well, by this audacity, which consists in so resolutely putting himself, a simple mortal, in the stead and place of God, of Infinite Power. It would seem that such an act of temerity, or sublimity, as you choose to call it,—such an act of usurpation could be expiated only by falling to his knees immediately after and humbling himself in the most submissive of prayers.

Milton and Bossuet would have done it and their picture would have seemed all the greater for it. Buffon did not do it, and did not even think of it. The moral sense is a little offended, amid all the wonder that that noble work arouses, to find it so dumb and so barren on the subject of Heaven.

In no other of his writings did Buffon manifest more clearly than in this work of his septuagenarian period

the full value of his perspicuity and plenitude of expression, of the boundless and flexible current of his speech applied to the greatest and most solemn subjects. Thus, as he grew old, he never ceased to mature and develop, acquiring new knowledge slowly each day, adding to his ideas, and finding a sort of freshness and rejuvenation even in the very profundity of his reflections.

Montesquieu when he grew old was fatigued, and showed it; Buffon was not. A comparison of the two men would be profitable and would definitively fix the characteristic features of Buffon's idea of nature and of the processes of his talent. Buffon acknowledged Montesquieu's genius, but he denied that he had style: he considered that, especially in the *Esprit des Lois,* there were too many sections and divisions; and this fault, for which he blamed the general plan of the book, he found repeated in the details,—in the thoughts and sentences; he criticised the over-refined style and the lack of connection. "I knew Montesquieu well," said he, "and this fault was due to his physical condition. The President was almost blind, and he was so quick that most of the time he forgot what he intended to dictate, so that he was obliged to confine himself within the least possible space." This is how he explained what sometimes seems like curtailment in Montesquieu's language. Buffon, on the other hand, had the faculty of retaining his voluminous writings in his memory, and he could

display them at will in all their vast extent,—ideas as well as the mode of expression.

In revenge, Montesquieu's conversation overflowed with flashes of wit, bright sallies, and metaphors, and resembled his writings. It was abrupt, like his style, impulsive, full of surprises, of sudden outbursts and apt retorts; he never missed the ball when it came in his direction. On the other hand, Buffon's conversation was laughed at a good deal as being far below the level of his style. I should think so! after working so many hours a day, after such incessant application of the mind that had borne and upheld so many things, he needed to relax, and his tongue moved as it could, in his family circle and among friends. And yet Madame Necker, who is such an excellent guide in everything relating to Buffon, speaks of the piquancy and instructiveness of his conversation, and cites more than one example. It would, in truth, be very strange if it had been otherwise. A mind rich in such stores of knowledge and of ideas could not be commonplace except by forgetfulness. But it was necessary to wait, to seize him at the right moment, and to know how to listen to him. In conversation Buffon liked neither contradictions nor interruptions; he would hold his peace and remain silent at the first objection that was made. "I cannot make up my mind," he would say, "to continue to converse with a man who deems himself justified, upon considering a subject for the first time, to contradict one who has thought

about it all his life." This led him to have intimates and admirers in his household, who never contradicted him; he could easily endure them. He allowed them to talk of him and his genius to his face, and talked of them himself good-humouredly, as his own age was already talking of him and as posterity was destined to do.

Let us try to view men as they are, without exaggerating them in all sorts of ways. Some superficial minds persist in seeing in Buffon the writer with powdered hair and lace cuffs; they are never tired of anecdotes about Montbar, and so far as he is concerned they do not go beyond the jests of d'Alembert or Rivarol; they blame him for the "Peacock," as if the "Peacock" were his; they berate him to this day for taking Gueneau de Montbelliard for an associate and Lacépède for his successor. But let us leave these frivolous critics. Another danger, which is that of serious and elevated minds, is the propensity to make Buffon more of a thinker and a prophet than he really was, to fancy that he had our present-day systems in his mind, and to place a halo about his brow. We should always ask ourselves, when we admire so profoundly a genius of the past: "What would he say to this way of being admired?" I do not know what Buffon would think of the various theories now contending with one another in natural history; I consider it hazardous to attempt to conjecture what he would think. God forbid that the temple of nature

which he so majestically reared should end by becoming a little church, where, on the pretence of bowing before him, people proceed to praise one another, as I see that they invariably do in many of the writings that I have mentioned.

The other day I was looking at Augustin Pajou's bust of Buffon, in the Musée du Louvre; he is there represented in his old age; the circle of the eye, the wrinkled and slightly wasted temples tell the story; but it is a fine head, dignified, erect, and nobly carried. The distance from the nose to the upper lip is considerable, and seems to indicate more or less arrogance and haughtiness. I find little of the lion, whatever Madame de Genlis may have said. The face is fine, however; it might well belong to the "amiable great man," as Gibbon called him. One divines a something sweet in its glance. The lofty forehead is not in the least bulging or Olympian, as our sculptors never fail to make it in all the heads carved for encyclopædias. I made the same reflection just before as I looked at the bust of Bossuet; there is no touch of exaggeration in all those sublime heads, and that of Buffon bears the imprint of his human character.

Bernardin de Saint-Pierre.

1737–1814.

Bernardin de Saint-Pierre.

THE disciple and biographer of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, M. Aimé Martin, who married his widow, has rendered more than one service to his memory; but he has carried his zeal and enthusiasm so far as to draw a romantic portrait of him and to write one of those impossible biographies which put a sensible reader on his guard at the beginning. Having to defend Bernardin against a number of accusations which affected his character, M. Martin plunges into an unqualified apology in terms that keep no bounds. A single passage will suffice as a specimen: "How many times," he cries, "I have found myself a better man on leaving him! Then virtue seemed natural and easy to me. A divine flame consumed me; I was like those disciples of Jesus Christ, who, on recalling the impression produced by his discourses, said one to another: 'Our hearts burned on listening to him.'" We must get away from this high-flown sort of thing as quickly as possible in order to find the real Bernardin.

Born at Havre on January 19, 1737, of a family originally of Lorraine, which would have liked to claim

descent from Eustache de Saint-Pierre of Calais, and which, in everything, had more claims than proofs, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre received a very informal and irregular and decidedly spasmodic education, in which nature, the ocean, and the country played a large part from the first day. At the age of eight he cultivated a little garden and did his share in raising flowers, as befitted the future author of the *Fraisier*. At the age of nine, having read several volumes of the "Fathers of the Desert," he left the house one morning, with his breakfast in his little basket, to take up the life of a hermit in the neighbourhood. He displayed an almost fraternal sympathy for various sorts of animals. There is a story of a cat which, when he told it to Jean-Jacques later, brought tears to the eyes of the man who, following Pythagoras, expressed his indignation that mankind should have reached the point of eating the flesh of beasts. One day he shook his fist threateningly at a carter who was abusing a horse.

His father having taken him to Rouen, young Bernardin, when they bade him look up at the towers of the cathedral, exclaimed: "*Mon Dieu!* how high they fly!" And everybody laughed. He had seen nothing but the swallows which had their nests in the towers. There again was manifested the predominant instinct of one whom none but natural beauties ever captivated and whom all art born of man touched hardly at all, nay, even offended, and who, in *Paul et Virginie* (the only blemish perhaps in that masterpiece), went so

far as to declaim in four passages, very close together, against the monuments of kings as opposed to those of nature.

The perusal of "Robinson Crusoe" was a great event in his life; he too sought in imagination his island; but it soon ceased to be a solitary island,—he provided himself with companions and peopled it at his pleasure with a select company of whom he constituted himself the pacific lawmaker; for he was ambitious, and his inclination led him naturally either to isolate himself or to play a noble rôle.

Judicious persons who knew him have explained to me his failings and his irritable character by saying that he had no bringing-up, that he was never subjected and broken to discipline. Perhaps he was not of a nature to bend to it. He was one of those mortals with a sweet and noble countenance, with fine blue eyes and a benevolent smile, who are endowed at birth with an unconquerable instinct. Speaking somewhere of the various instincts of animals, and likening them to those secret, innate affections which are allotted to every man destined to make his way or to suffer, he says:

"Our whole life is simply the development of these affections. It is they which, when our condition is antipathetic to them, inspire us with unwavering constancy, and involve us, in the midst of the multitude, in never-ending, deplorable battles against others and against ourselves. But when they develop under favourable circumstances, then they cause unfamiliar arts and extraordinary talents to manifest themselves."

And he cites Homer, Raphael, Columbus, Herschel, as having been endowed, one and all, with a characteristic genius which ruled them and which they could not avoid. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre had his genius as well as they. His ideal marked itself out betimes, and through all his disappointments he never turned aside from it. This ideal was to found a colony which should be an idyllic affair and in which he would reign over docile and happy subjects, not without some notes of the antique flute. In Russia one day, when the Empress Catherine seemed to smile, Bernardin smiled only upon his cherished plan of founding a colony on the shores of Lake Aral,—a cosmopolitan colony for the benefit of all poor and virtuous strangers. Later, he went on, in imagination, to attempt to transplant something of the same dream to the shores of Madagascar, then to Corsica, and still later to that undefined expanse in the western part of America, north of California. He conceived in his brain and carried with him wherever he went a world where all was order and harmony, a sort of Eden or age of gold, which he absolutely refused to lay aside, and persisted in treating as real amid the discords of all sorts which were so repugnant to him. It was only at the end, despairing of success, that he abandoned the idea of carrying out his projects in distant lands and made up his mind "to draw water from his own well," that is to say, instead of trying to do things, to take his paper and describe them.

The Utopian, at the end of his rope, seized the pen and became a painter. Those harmonies which he could not realise on earth, in political and civil life, he sought in the study of nature, and he narrated with a sense of consolation, and with delight, what he saw there. "All my ideas are simply shadows of nature, gathered by another shadow." But with these shadows his brush blended softness and light; that is sufficient for his glory.

Thus Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's life is divided quite distinctly into two parts: in the first he roams about the world at random, passing from disappointment to disappointment; young, handsome, full of charm at first sight, and generally well received, he fails in everything because he does not in reality apply himself seriously to any occupation; and because, in whatever he undertakes, he always has his secret *arrière-pensée* of becoming a semi-mythological coloniser, his chimera of being an Orpheus or an Amphion. In the second part of his life, which he does not enter upon until late, too late, and after much suffering and bitterness of spirit, he is simply an author and man of letters, aspiring, under a roof of his own, to dislodge his Minerva, as he says, from her rustic throne, and to put a globe at her feet, if he can; his real vocation is found. These two periods of his life are separated by a sort of crisis and moral illness, which is interesting to watch and which gives us the key to his nature.

After some elementary studies in mathematics, Bernardin, who had entered the School of Roads and Bridges as a pupil, conceived the idea of serving in the engineer corps of the army; he was admitted to that corps in pursuance of this first blunder, but he was never successful in his efforts to be received on a footing of equality. He made a campaign in Hesse in 1760, and got into trouble with his superior officers. Shortly after, he repeated the same blunder in a journey to the island of Malta, then threatened with a siege; he went without his commission as geographical engineer, could not manage to be received on a suitable footing, and returned home angry and dissatisfied. He encountered new difficulties on his return to France. It fell out with him then as with all imaginative men, who soar the higher the more you refuse them. Being unable to obtain his rehabilitation and a commission in the French service as quickly as he wished, he reverted to the idea of becoming a legislator on a great scale, and he determined to offer his services in Russia where Catherine had just seized the Empire.

He betook himself thither by slow stages, through Holland and Lubeck, making friends along the road; for he was an attractive youth, with much charm of manner and a touching artlessness, and with rich stores of delicate feeling and affection when his sensitive self-esteem was not involved. In this Russian trip, however, he again found a way to make his

position embarrassing by calling himself the *Chevalier* de Saint-Pierre, and assuming a coat of arms of his own manufacture. Very often, when he was presented to some person of note, he was asked if he belonged to the noble family of Saint-Pierre, which was then very much in evidence at Versailles; he was obliged to answer "No," and it made him wince.

His adventures in Russia, and, after leaving there, in Poland, have been strangely doctored and *romancified* by his biographer, M. Aimé Martin; a simple narrative would have served the purpose much better than his always sentimental descriptions. Bernardin's imitator and disciple has put on two or three layers of moonlight where Bernardin himself would have introduced only a single beam.

A published correspondence shows us Bernardin *au naturel* after his sojourn at Warsaw in the summer of 1764 (he was then twenty-seven years old); it is his correspondence with M. Hennin, then French resident at Warsaw, and afterward chief clerk in the Department of Foreign Affairs. This series of letters was intrusted by M. Hennin's son, a distinguished antiquary, to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's widow and M. Aimé Martin, who had them printed in 1826. The editors considered it their duty, however, to suppress some passages, and Bernardin's widow in particular besought the owner of the letters, most urgently and with tears, to permit her to destroy five

or six, which revealed the great writer's moral position in too distressing a light.

At the very beginning, which corresponds to the climax of the young officer's love-affair with the beautiful Princess Miesnik, at Warsaw, we find him describing the fêtes and balls of that luxurious life of which he is a part. On leaving these festivities and returning home, at three in the morning, he dreams, he says, of nothing but Lignon and Arcadie. But the man of sense adds these words, which show that in Bernardin the romantic did not strangle the actual:

"All these fêtes do not amuse me so much as you imagine. When I return home I naturally compare my position with all those about me, and I see that I am nobody, and that I must soon have done with it all; a substantial and influential friend would be much better suited to my character and my means; I shall have found such an one in you if your friendship may be won by friendship."

Racine's tragedy, *Iphigénie,* is given by amateur actors and actresses, who are all princes and daughters or nieces of palatines; the Chevalier de Saint-Pierre plays Achille. On leaving these gorgeous functions, he must needs return to a little room which he has hired for five ducats. These material details reveal the weak side of his precarious situation, and it is a side that Bernardin never lost sight of.

After making an attempt to throw himself into the faction opposed to the new King of Poland, Stanislas Poniatowski, he is received by him with distinction; but the place in the artillery that is offered him is

worth only forty ducats a year. "This offer *humiliates* me," he writes to M. Hennin (January 2, 1765), "and distresses me to a degree that I cannot express. I have made up my mind, and I propose to return to France." In M. Hennin's reply to this letter, which the editors were so ill-advised as to omit, we find that sensible man combating Bernardin's determination and representing to him that there is nothing humiliating in the offer that was made him; that the first step is the essential thing, and that the rest cannot fail to follow. M. Hennin, having assisted Bernardin with his purse, is entitled to give him this good advice; he speaks the language of a judicious mind which assumes in its correspondent a genuine desire to establish his fortune and his destiny. He speaks one language, but Bernardin speaks another; at that very moment he is listening involuntarily to the inward voice of that genius which has hitherto deluded him with promises and will continue to delude him for a long while, but which nevertheless does not lie to him when it says: "It is not in that direction that glory lies for you."

As he sincerely wishes to oblige his young friend, M. Hennin makes inquiries at the departments in Paris, and he is told that Bernardin de Saint-Pierre is not a chevalier, and that there is some question about the other titles and qualifications that he has assumed. Bernardin takes umbrage at this result of the inquiry, and, as M. Hennin has accommodated him none the

less without first telling him what he knew, he says to him:

"You gave me at Vienna, monsieur, a strong proof of your friendship; but the silence that you have maintained does not prove your esteem for me. That does not at all diminish my gratitude, however, and gives me the highest opinion of you, since you accommodated me when I must have been an object of suspicion to you."

Here we detect the germ of that tone and those sentiments *à la Jean-Jacques* of which Bernardin was destined to be an additional example in the critical period of his life, and which constituted in his case, as in that of the Genevese philosopher, a genuine disease of misanthropy.

Returning to France (1766) without resources, and burdened with debts, he becomes a more urgent solicitor than ever to the ministers and their satellites. He seems, at certain times, to hesitate between his first wandering vocation, and his second and final one, which was the pen. Taking up his abode with the curé of Ville-d'Avray, he arranges his observations and his reminiscences of travel; he writes his *Mémoires* concerning Holland, Prussia, Saxony, Poland, and Russia. His plan expands as he applies himself to it. His structure would easily become immense, were it not that time, materials, and tranquillity of mind are lacking. "Thus do I spin my silk," he says; "I shall see the end of it with the end of my strength."

This life, although rather depressing, would suit

him well enough if it could only last. He is even beginning to carry his plans farther; his systematic mind leads him on to physical speculations.

"I have collected," he says, "my observations on the movement of the earth, and I have formed a theory so bold, so novel, and so plausible that I dare not communicate it to anybody. I let it sleep in peace, for I distrust my solitude, in which one may unsuspectingly familiarise oneself with the most absurd ideas. You can see from this," he adds, "that I grasp at everything, and that I leave threads floating about here and there, like the spider, until I can spin my web."

And we see, as he goes on, the talent of writing come to life of itself under his pen, and metaphors burst into bloom.

Meanwhile he succeeds in obtaining an assignment as captain of engineers in the Île de France,[1] and he decides to go thither. He is thirty-one years old; he has not yet exhausted all his spirit of adventure and his youthful vigour, and it is well that he should go to that unfamiliar hemisphere to mix his colours and finish his painter's palette. We have the narrative of his journey, which he published in 1773: *Voyage à l'Île de France, à l'Île de Bourbon, au Cap de Bonne Espérance, par un Officier du Roi.* To be a king's officer,—that was always his ambition, his hope, and it was never fully satisfied.

In this first effort of Bernardin we can detect already the substance and the principal lines of his talent; it is

[1] [More familiarly known to us as Mauritius, the scene of *Paul et Virginie*.—Tr.]

less fully developed, less ideal, but for that very reason, more real in places, and in a certain sense more true, than what he will say later in the *Études* and the *Harmonies.* The work was noticed by only a few; in order that men shall pay any heed to a new talent or genius, it must needs appear to them with plenitude and superabundance, and give them always a little too much.

There is, then, sobriety of expression and a very clean-cut turn of phrase in the *Voyage,* written in the form of letters to a friend ; they are sketches instinct with life, rather than pictures. The emotional painter can be recognised, however, in the very first lines; the descriptions are not dry; the landscape is introduced only to be brought into relations with the living characters. "A landscape," he says, "is the background of the picture of human life."

When he reaches the Île de France he describes its soil and vegetation in detail and with interest, but without pleasure,—rather with a sort of melancholy. "There is not a flower in the fields, which indeed are strewn with stones and covered with a grass as tough as hemp. There is no flowering plant with a pleasant odour. Of all the shrubs not one comes up to our whitethorn. The wild vines have not the charm of the honeysuckle or the ivy. *There are no violets in all the woods.*" But when he goes farther into the island, when he approaches one of those little dwellings lost in the densest woods and on the slopes

of the mountains, and finds there the unlooked-for image of plenty, of peace, and of family life, he is touched, and he finds some very harmonious colours with which to depict his emotion.

"I saw but a single room in the whole house: in the centre, the kitchen; at one end the storerooms and servants' beds; at the other end the conjugal bed, covered with a sheet, on which a hen was setting; under the bed were ducks; pigeons in the arbour, and three great dogs at the door. On the walls were hanging all the utensils used in housekeeping or the work in the fields. I was really surprised to find in that wretched abode a very pretty woman. She was a Frenchwoman, and of a respectable family, as was her husband. They had come there several years before in search of fortune; they had left kindred, friends, fatherland, to pass their days in an uncivilised spot, where they can see naught save the sea and the awful declivities of Brabant Mountain; but that young matron's air of contentment and kindliness seemed to make every one happy who approached her. She was nursing one of her children; the other four were playing about her, merry and contented.

"When night came, everything eatable that the house contained was served with perfect cleanliness. That supper seemed very delicious to me. I was never tired of watching the pigeons fly about the table, the kids playing with the children, and so many animals assembled about that charming family. Their peaceful games, the solitude of the place, and the murmur of the sea afforded an image of those first days when the daughters of Noah, set down upon a new earth, shared with the gentle domestic beasts their roof, their table, and their bed."

That man was already a great painter who, without applying himself to the task, thus described what he saw. But despite such happy touches, the *Voyage* still fell short of entire exactitude in that it lacked that intimate, magical life which Bernardin, after a second visit to the Île de France, was able to impart to these

same scenes when he saw them again in the distance, no longer in the tedium of exile, but with the fondness of regret and with the vividness of absence.

Many pages of *Paul et Virginie* are simply a poetic and coloured painting of the sketch that we have in the *Voyage*. To cite but a single example: the journey of Virginie and her brother to the Rivière-Noire is made, in the *Voyage,* by Bernardin, accompanied by his negro attendant; and where, on his return, before reaching the mountain of the Trois-Mamelles, he has to ford a river, and the negro takes his master across on his back, in the romance it is Paul who takes Virginie on his back. Thus the imagination, with its facile and powerful touch, transfigures and glorifies everything in retrospect.

After undergoing much suffering and finding himself so cramped in that island which he was destined to immortalise, Bernardin, once more in France (May, 1771), set about tempting and wearying fortune anew. He busied himself in writing his *Voyage;* he saw some men of letters,—Rousseau and d'Alembert; for some little time he was popular in the Encyclopedist circle. Condorcet became interested in him and wrote to Turgot about him. Turgot was Minister of Marine, and Bernardin had been for some time petitioning to be sent overland to the Indies, on a mission of observation and discovery.

It was with Rousseau that Bernardin de Saint-Pierre had most to do, and with him he formed as close a

friendship as the wretched philosopher's mental state permitted. The pages that Bernardin wrote about him afford perhaps the simplest and most natural idea of the man and his character; for it seems to me that by dint of writing about Rousseau, people end by drawing him out terribly thin and putting him to the torture.

At the time when he was seeing Rousseau frequently and trying to lighten his gloomy moods, Bernardin himself was, or was on the point of being, afflicted in some degree with the same malady. He confesses it in the Preamble to his *Arcadie;* and even if he did not confess it, his correspondence with M. Hennin makes it impossible to doubt it. M. Hennin had become, in March, 1778, chief clerk in the Department of Foreign Affairs, under M. de Vergennes. Bernardin, in his readiness to be deluded, instantly made up his mind that he had found in him a powerful patron, whereas he really found in him, as before, simply a judicious, loyal, steadfast friend, trying to serve him step by step, but being himself, with respect to the ministers, in a subordinate and secondary position only. The correspondence between them that has been published would give only an imperfect and too one-sided idea of their relations, if we were not aware that many of M. Hennin's answers have been suppressed; that this excellent friend who does not always reply, acts more than he talks; and that there are times when the letters he receives from

Bernardin in rapid succession find him in the midst of an overwhelming press of work. "Your third letter," he wrote (November 18, 1780), "is the *seventy-ninth* that I ought to answer to-day, and there are some among them that relate to matters of great urgency." And in a postscript: "I had written *nine hours* last evening when I finished the draft of this letter. I actually could not see. I gave it to my copyist, who was unable to despatch it until this morning."

Bernardin, who lives in solitude, whose nerves are excited, and who has no rest until he receives a reply, falls into the error of thinking that he has rights where he can ask only favours. He conceives that the government owes him reparation and an indemnity for his adventures in Poland, and for his various abortive enterprises,—even for the memorials that he has sent to several ministers without being asked for them. One day, after many attempts, M. Hennin obtains for him from M. de Vergennes (November 29, 1780) a gratuity of three hundred livres on the fund set aside for men of letters. "It 's a trifle, but the thing is to make a beginning." Moreover, these gratuities on the literary fund are annual and equivalent to pensions for life, although that is not stated in terms. Bernardin, who has petitioned *ad nauseam,* takes offence at the form of the grant and at the fund on which it is charged: it is as an officer in the king's service, as a captain of engineers, that he wishes to be indemnified, or as having served French diplomacy in Poland. He

writes to the minister that "it is impossible for him to accept alms from his department." I have before me a long letter from M. Hennin in which he urges in reply the most sensible arguments imaginable. "I will even confess," he adds, "that I was just starting, when I received your letter, to ask M. le Marquis de Castries for a like annual sum for you in the shape of a pension on the Marine establishment, with the hope of succeeding sooner or later." In conclusion he gives him counsel inspired by affection: "My friend, you are too much sequestered from the world; you know nothing of men or of the progress of affairs. How do you expect to extricate yourself from a plight which causes you distress, if you spurn the hands that would help you out of it?"

This sensitiveness of Bernardin's manifests itself in the most trivial matters: he is displeased if letters are sent to him from Versailles with the title of "Engineer in the Navy"; he says that he never was that. He takes offence likewise if any one, in writing to him, gives him his baptismal name, Bernardin, in conjunction with Saint-Pierre. "M. Panckoucke," he says in one place, "is the first and only man who ever called me *Bernardin.*" We, ourselves, while using that name so often and so familiarly to designate the great writer, almost feel that we must apologise to his ashes. This remark about M. Panckoucke is connected with another outbreak of sensitiveness on Bernardin's part, which did not take place till later. He received notice

one day that the king had granted him a gratuity on the *Mercure,* and that all he had to do to obtain it was to go to the treasury. But as the notice came to him from the treasurer, and without a letter from the minister, M. de Breteuil, he declined it at first and took umbrage as he did in the case of M. de Vergennes' gratuity. Whereupon M. Hennin, whom he was near driving frantic, wrote to him this line, which sums up our whole opinion: "You are good-tempered, simple, and modest, and yet there are times when you seem to have taken for a model your friend Jean-Jacques, the vainest of mortals." [1]

Meanwhile, amid these freaks and spasms of an ever so slightly diseased brain, Bernardin never ceases to petition all the departments, and thanks to good friends, among whom M. Hennin is always numbered, he succeeds in securing a modest competence with the various odds and ends and gratuities that he extorts. Let us speak out the whole of our thought: if Bernardin had thus solicited aid only in those years when he was absolutely in need of it, when he was like a father or a mother striving to bring forth the unknown fruit of his genius or the child of her womb; if he had not retained that habit of lamentation and begging

[1] [M. Sainte-Beuve prints in full these two letters of M. Hennin (December 3, 1780, and August 13, 1785), which, according to him, "throw a bright light upon Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's mental peculiarity, without, however, exaggerating it in the least. . . . . Need I say," he adds, "that these two refusals on Bernardin's part were simply for form and did not hold good?"—Tr.]

even in his most fortunate days, and alternated constantly between the idyll and the account book,—it would be simply touching, it would be worthy of respect and sacred.

There are many delightful passages in these letters. This man of genius, more than forty years old, so poor that, when he wants to see M. Hennin, he is compelled to walk from Paris to Versailles and to return the same way, selecting in advance nights when there is a moon, which sometimes leaves him in the lurch,—this man writes words worthy of an Eastern sage or of an ancient.

"At last I have sought water in my own well; in the last six years I have put on paper many thoughts which need to be arranged in order. Amid much sand there are, I hope, a few grains of gold."

"Hopes are the nerves of life; in a state of tension they are painful; cut them and they no longer hurt."

"We are always too old to do good, but always young enough to advise it. What care I! I shall have produced some beautiful pictures; I shall have comforted, strengthened, and encouraged man in the swift passing of life."

"I have to arrange some most interesting materials, and I can recover my strength only where I can see the sky. I should prefer a charcoal burner's cabin to a château. Procure a rabbit's burrow for me, in which I can pass the summer in the country."

The ancients said "a lizard's hole."

In order to work more independently, he has lodgings in Faubourg Saint-Marceau, on Rue Neuve-Saint-Étienne, at the very top of a house, where he overlooks the garden of the Dames Anglaises. This is not the acme of his desires, for he aspires to a garden of

his own and a cottage, to live near the ground and not so high in the air. However, while he is finishing there his *Études*, a sort of rustic poem, or concert, which he dedicates to Nature, he has some pleasurable emotions, forerunners of the joys of paternity. On February 7, 1781, he writes to M. Hennin these words, which are like a burst of song; there is in the depths of Bernardin's being a pastoral soul, which, in the midst of his sorrows, awakes at the slightest excuse and begins to sing:

"I shall come to see you with the first violet; I shall have nearly five leagues to walk, but I shall come gaily, and I propose to give you such a description of my retreat that I shall arouse a desire to come to see me here and take a little collation. Horace invited Mæcenas to come to his little house at Tivoli and eat a quarter of lamb and drink Falernian. As my fortune falls far short of equalling his golden mediocrity, I shall give you only strawberries and cream in earthen dishes; but you will have the pleasure of hearing the nightingales sing among the shrubbery of the Dames Anglaises, and of seeing their scholars and their young novices play about in their garden."

I have been unable to fix the precise moment of Bernardin's great nervous crisis, when he reveals himself to us (in the Preamble to *Arcadie*) stricken by a strange malady, subject to sudden flashes which distort his sight, seeing everything double and in motion, and fancying that he is surrounded by enemies and ill-wishers whenever he meets a number of people in the public gardens or in the streets. I imagine that the date of this curious attack was not far from that on which he wrote M. Hennin the charming letter that we have just

read; that is to say, it was during the months immediately preceding the publication of the *Études*. He frequently repeated this proverb of the Persians: "The narrowest part of the mountain pass is where it enters the plain." He passed the whole winter of 1783–1784 in copying his work, adding to it, and cutting it. "The bear does not lick her cub with more care. I am afraid that I shall end by wearing away the muzzle of mine by dint of licking it. I do not propose to touch it any more."

It is in such moments of exhaustion that he writes: "Sedentary work is a noiseless file. It was high time that I finished mine; my eyesight is blurred at night; I see things double, especially anything in the air or on the horizon; but my trust is in Him who makes the light and the eye." He is seized with enthusiasm as he reads over his work, and he is the first to enjoy the beauties that he is about to disclose: "There are moments," he cries, "when I have glimpses of heaven, while I suffer in this world, if the truth be told, indescribable tortures." He feels that he has the power to charm; the old theological censor who is assigned to his work is himself fascinated, and cannot help saying that it is "divine, delightful." "I know how much I must discount such praise, but it pleases me. In order to be useful, one must be agreeable, and I venture to hope that the tribute which I owed to God and to man will give pleasure to my epoch."

And in very truth the *Études de la Nature,* which

were published in 1784, were expressly adapted to that very period and to the very hour when they appeared; to that brilliant and placid portion of the reign of Louis XVI, after the American war and before the Assembly of the Notables, when an effeminate and corrupt society dreamed of all sorts of perfection and easily managed regeneration, with no purpose to renounce any of its luxuries. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, whose plan included "seeking our pleasures in nature and our ills in society," attacked this *beau monde* on its weak side, and flattered it even while he criticised it.

His book was not a conventional work; he had at first, he said in opening, had the idea of writing a general history of nature; but ere long, abandoning a too extensive plan, he had confined himself to bringing together some portions of it,—ruins he called them,—leaving only the façade standing. These ruins of his original work resembled those which are scattered over a landscape and which embellish it; he had covered them with flowers and verdure. There were too many flowers, there was too much verdure, but the age wanted a good supply of them, especially in books. The theories which Bernardin had mingled with his descriptions did no harm. Ignorant people, the semi-learned, were very fond of arguing about all sorts of things, divine and worldly, after the publication of the *Encyclopédie*. After Buffon, Bernardin appeared in those avenues of nature in the guise of a

gentler, more attractive high priest, who introduced in his plausible explanations something of the unctuousness and of the smile of Fénelon. He began by giving the history of his strawberry-vine, and every one who could duplicate it on his window-sill was won over to a science so readily acquired. He spoke against methods, against libraries, schools, and academies; he protested against the abuse, even against the use, of analysis. "In order to judge fittingly the magnificent spectacle of nature we must leave every object in its place, and ourselves remain where nature has placed us." He insisted therefore that we should accustom ourselves to consider living things in their natural and harmonious situations, and not isolated and dissected in the cabinets and collections of scientists. However, this recommendation was very vague; one kind of study does not exclude the other; we examine the plant on its stalk, and we preserve what we can of it in our herbariums.

These objections, and many others which any judicious mind might offer, did not prevent the success due to novelty, fascination, and elegance; moreover, the increasing influence of Rousseau and of discussions concerning susceptibility and religion had prepared men's minds to seize eagerly upon such prospects. The women, the young people, all that ever-swelling crowd of followers of Émile and Saint-Preux, hailed with cries of joy this new apostle, of the fascinating speech. People became innocent by reading the *Études* on the

morrow of the *Mariage de Figaro.* Grimm, the clever literary chargé d'affaires of eight sovereigns of the North, wrote in vain to his patrons that the work was simply "a long series of eclogues, hymns and madrigals in honour of Providence"; fashion in this case was in accord with eternal morality.

Bernardin was a painter who declared that he knew nothing, while really believing himself to be better informed than the scholars, and whose whole system resulted simply in describing his natural impressions to himself in a thousand different ways. If one would form an idea at the outset of his type of talent, let him read, in the first *Étude,* the picture of a landscape at the mouth of a river. How well he draws it! how he arranges everything in order! how he clothes it with plants and trees, happily combined or contrasted! how he sheds light upon it, and the impression of peace, of silence! and how skilfully he introduces a moral sentiment as well! Therein lies the secret of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's triumph. In landscape he has the moral force of Poussin, the light of Claude; and in describing those objects which others before him had deemed horrifying or inanimate, he has the soft outlines and purity of Guido.

Bernardin is not simply pious and affecting, he is inclined to preach; he sins by the over-susceptibility of his time, and there is a certain severity of taste which he does not observe. Because of this excess, he is always inferior to Poussin. In the compo-

sition of this first landscape, on an island at the mouth of a river, seeking to give his work a moral imprint, he imagines a tomb there, and at first he selects the tomb which was then classic and fashionable, that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Then he rejects or modifies this first idea.

"Do you wish," he says, "to magnify the impression produced by this picture without, however, changing the nature of its subject? If so, remove the place, the time, and the monument to a greater distance. Let the island be Lemnos, let the trees be the thickets of laurel and wild olive, and the tomb that of Philoctetes. Let us see there the cavern in which that great man lived, abandoned by the Greeks whom he had served, his wooden jar, and the bow and arrows of Hercules."

And thus he produces an effect wholly moral, which becomes more imposing at a distance, "because," he says, "to confer benefits on men, and to be out of their reach, is to resemble Divinity in some measure."

That is a fine conception. But in a somewhat analogous picture, which he offers us in the thirteenth *Étude*, and in which he shows us a traveller shipwrecked on an unknown island, which proves to be Naxos, he has overshot the mark; applying the same idealising process to the story of Ariadne, he represents that young daughter of Minos, in the legendary tale of a shepherd, bewailing the faithless Theseus night and day, and refusing to be comforted even by the young women of Naxos who offer her wine in golden cups. The shepherd, pointing to the

tomb which tradition designates as Ariadne's, adds: "This monument, like all those in this country, has been defaced by the years, and even more by the barbarians; but the memory of unfortunate virtue is not in the power of tyrants on earth." And Bernardin, having completed his picture, adds in his turn: "I doubt whether an *atheist* even, who recognises nothing in nature but the laws of matter and of motion, could be insensible to the sentiment evoked by these present-day morals and these memories of the olden time." What is there in common, I pray to know, between an *atheist* and the natural ideas suggested by the story of Ariadne, after Catullus, as told by a shepherd? And what has Ariadne, a fugitive lover, afterward abandoned, who tries to drown her sorrow in wine, in common with the idea of *unfortunate virtue?* It is these touches of the eighteenth century and of the age of Louis XVI which spoil Greece for me in Bernardin's pages, and which mar, in my eyes, the descriptions due to his pure talent. There is always room for a virtuous Duc de Penthièvre in some part of his landscapes.

The first part of the *Études de la Nature* is directed wholly against the atheists. In the eighteenth century the atheist was a genus apart, a condition; men said of such an one, pointing the finger at him: "He is an *atheist*"; and, consequently, of another: "He is a *deist.*" These two categories stood face to face. Bernardin, who was religious at heart, became a deist

by profession, and he never ceased to contend, by every conceivable argument, against his adversaries. He pleaded the regularity and harmony of nature against the partisans of disorder and chance, and he found in this controversy, which it delighted him to prolong, admirable subjects and openings for his talent, together with pretexts for his well-meaning subtleties and for the infinite variations of his reveries. He improved upon the *Vicaire Savoyard,* and seemed to have taken it upon himself to develop him in innumerable new ways in which there was mingled the charm of mystery.

About the tenth *Étude* he begins to set forth more directly his views and his conception of the harmonies of nature, the play of contrasts and consonances, of reflections and echoes in everything; there are some very nice distinctions, but it is very subtle, and in his old age, as he becomes more and more fixed in his views, he accentuates all his faults, which his final work, *Les Harmonies,* displays in immeasurable profusion.

Unknown, looked down upon, and indigent but yesterday, the author became in a few days a great man and a favourite of public opinion. Letters from admirers began to pour upon him in his solitude from all directions.

"Susceptible souls write me letters overflowing with enthusiasm; women offer me prescriptions for my diseases; rich men, dinners; landed proprietors, houses in the country; authors, copies of their

works; society folk, their good offices, their patronage, and even money. I accept none of all these things except the simple testimony of their good will."

And Bernardin added artlessly: "If the clergy offer me a pension I will accept it with gratitude, I who have lived hitherto solely on the king's benefactions." There was, in truth, a time when the clergy entertained the curious scheme of adopting Bernardin as an opponent of Buffon and the Encyclopedist party, and of paying him a pension as their advocate. It was a mere notion which a little reflection cut short. But the favour of society went on increasing, and infected all classes, even the highest. Queen Marie Antoinette, dining with Madame de Polignac, quoted the *Études,* apropos of the East Indian birds, "some of which have red breasts in the mating season, as if they were arrayed in dress clothes supplied by nature only for the honeymoon." That was a remark calculated to impress a young and beautiful queen.

Madame de Coislin, one of the most considerable and most refined women of the old Court, invited the author to call upon her. While he enjoyed these tardy but sincere testimonials, he was not seduced by them; he withdrew more and more out of reach of the whirlpool, and bought a little hermitage near the Barrière du Jardin-du-Roi, on Rue de la Reine-Blanche. "He has gone to live," said Chamfort (who was then quartered at the Hôtel de Vaudreuil), "in a quarter so out of the way and inhabited by such a low class of peo-

ple, that those who are interested in him are alarmed for his safety." "I do not know," Bernardin retorted, "whether M. de Chamfort knows anybody who is interested in me. When I came to live in the quarter of the poor, I put myself in the place in which I had long been classified."[1] His wound was not yet healed despite the sweets of success and the public recompense of his labours. "You see only the flower"; he said to those who congratulated him; "the thorn has remained in my nerves." Nevertheless, in the midst of this half-assuaged suffering, he pursued his course, and in 1788 he published the fourth volume of the *Études,* which contained *Paul et Virginie.*[2]

[1] Bernardin never went into society except against his will. He was always sensitive and constrained there. Here is an anecdote which I had at first hand, and which probably belongs to a somewhat later date; in it we see how eagerly the fair sex sought the author of so many delightful pages and failed to find him. I allow the witness of the incident to use his own words:

"Bernardin de Saint-Pierre was at Malmaison, at Madame Lecoulteux du Moley's; he exhibited himself in as unamiable a light as Abbé Delille was amiable; he made disagreeable remarks to the ladies and about them. He had brought a dog with him that was taken sick. Madame Lecoulteux was troubled about him and had him nursed and drugged; but the beast died. One morning, as Bernardin did not come down at the breakfast hour, the mistress of the house sent to his room to make inquiries. They found no one in his room,—only a short note in which he said that they had killed his dog and he had gone. Thereupon that amiable and sentimental company was deeply moved; they conceived the idea of having a funeral for the cherished dog and interring him in a little grave, with a branch of weeping willow *à la Jean-Jacques*. They wrote all this to the sulky boor, to appease him; they got no reply."

[2] It was published separately, immediately after, in innumerable editions.

That simple tale is Bernardin's really immortal work; one cannot reread it without tears, and that is true of so few books that are popular at their birth.[1] I will not repeat here an analysis that has been made so many times; let us shun commentaries longer than the poem itself. Here everything—almost everything—is perfect; simple, modest and affecting, tranquil and enchanting. The metaphors blend with the narrative and crown each portion of it with perfect judgment, with no appearance of effort, and no attempt to compel admiration. All the harmonies, all the contrasts, all the reflections, of which he had so much to say in the *Études,* and of which he drew a somewhat vague poetic description,—all these are made real here, in an appropriate frame, where, at the outset, the location, the names of places, the varied aspects of the landscape are calculated to arouse presentiments and to contribute to the emotion evoked by the ensemble. The thing that sets this lovely pastoral apart for all time is that it is true, with a human and palpable reality: the graces and sports of childhood are not succeeded by an imaginary and fabulous youth. From the moment that Virginie feels that she is excited by an unfamiliar malady, and her lovely blue eyes are

[1] ["One day, at Madame Necker's," says Sainte-Beuve in another place, "Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, then hardly known, tried to read *Paul et Virginie;* it is a simple story and the reader's voice trembled; everybody else yawned, and after quarter of an hour, M. de Buffon, who had a loud voice, called out to the footman: 'Tell them to put the horses to my carriage!'"—Tr.]

"streaked with black," we are plunged in passion; and this fascinating little book, which Fontanes, a little too tritely, placed between *Télémaque* and the *Mort d'Abel,* I should place between *Daphnis and Chloe* and the immortal fourth book of the Æneid, in honour of Dido. The true Virgilian genius breathes therein. Toward the end, in the heartrending scene of the storm, Bernardin demonstrated that his brush had at its command, when he chose, strong and solemn colours, and that he knew how to depict nature in the sublimity of her horrors no less than in her beauties. For all analysis, then, let us read *Paul et Virginie* once more, and, if we wish to realise its worth more fully, let us try to read *Atala* immediately after; there is a complete lesson in natural rhetoric in the comparative impression that will result.

To a person who should have asked him if he himself were not the old colonist of *Paul et Virginie* (in whose mouth the tale is put), Bernardin might have made the same reply that Rousseau once made to him when he asked him if Saint-Preux were not himself: "No, he is not altogether what I was, but what I would have liked to be." In the whole speech of the colonist, "And so I pass my days far from mankind," etc., he drew his own ideal portrait and his dream of the happy close of life. But, apart from this somewhat too amiable portrait of himself, I think that there are no portraits in *Paul et Virginie;* the characters,

lifelike as they are, are wholly of the painter's creation. Some far-off resemblances to persons whom he had met in his earlier days have been noticed, but it is in the names alone that the reminiscence, the echo, so to speak, is perceptible. In Russia Bernardin might have married Mademoiselle de la Tour, niece of General du Bosquet; in Berlin he might have married Mademoiselle Virginie Taubenheim; pleasant remembrances led him to combine the two names in that of the dearest creation of his fancy.[1] Being too poor he had thought that he ought not to accept the hand of either. Benign munificence! lo, in this single offering he paid them both the marriage portion of genius. The name of Paul, too, not without design, happens to have belonged to an excellent monk, whose life he determined, in his childhood, to imitate, and whom he used to accompany in alms-seeking expeditions.

The Revolution, sweeping through his life and subjecting it to new tests just when he thought that he was safely in port, did not prevent Bernardin from dreaming, or from pursuing the peaceful development of his theories. He continued to listen to the harmony of the spheres, to believe and to say that "the human race is progressing toward perfection; that our forefathers passed through the age of iron, and that the age of gold lies before us." His pen and his imagination concurred in these views, and the reality did

[1] [It will be remembered that Virginie is the daughter of Madame de la Tour.—Tr.]

not embarrass him. He formed very accurate judgments, however, on particular facts; he remarks somewhere that "the majority of men obey fear alone." But in his study he reverted to the theory of universal benevolence and love.

In 1792, when he was fifty-five years of age, he married a young woman of twenty-two, Mademoiselle Félicité Didot, and in his correspondence with her we find him exclusively intent, as always, upon realising his project of a lonely island and a cabin. He was for some time superintendent of the Jardin-du-Roi; but he was not allowed to retain that post.[1] Appointed professor of morals at the École Normale, which was hurriedly instituted in the year III, he appeared two or three times in his chair, and was applauded for the least word he spoke. He deemed himself fortunate, however, when the approaching close of the school set him free from that duty of public speech, for which he was little fitted. Established at Essone, he there lost his first wife, who left him two children, named as of right Paul and Virginie, and who also bequeathed to him some unpleasant quarrels with her family.

Married a second time, at the age of sixty-three, to Mademoiselle Désirée de Pellepore, a young and attractive person who readily adapted herself to his

[1] [In 1791 his name was included by the National Assembly in a list from which a governor of the Prince Royal was to be chosen.—Tr.]

tastes, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre had a happy old age. His letters, even to the very end, bear witness to his joyous imagination. "I am an old tree," he said, "that bears young twigs." He had exchanged his hermitage at Essone for another retreat at Eragny, on the banks of the Oise; there he lost himself in the pleasing speculations with which he filled his *Harmonies*. He flattered himself that we should go some day to the sun, where, as the reward of a virtuous life, we should enjoy the marvellous spectacle of all creation; he saw in his Paradise the plenitude and triumph of his physical system.

There are some very pretty passages in Bernardin's letters to his second wife; a sincere love of the country breathes in every line. Speaking of a change of the moon and of violent rains in the month of May, he writes to her: "This abundance of rain hastens the growth of the vegetation; it is essential to its progress and its needs; the month of May is a child that wants the breast all the time. I embrace you, my love, my joy, my month of May." Is not this "month of May always wanting the breast," a most charming and most eloquent image, especially when addressed to a young wife and mother?

When he comes to Paris for the sessions of the Institute, Bernardin is always less contented. One day he was present when they were discussing, as usual, the Dictionary, that Penelope's web of the language. Under the word *Appartenir* they had put as an ex-

ample: *Il appartient au père de châtier ses enfants.*[1] At that Bernardin protests, he rebels, and thinks it most surprising that when there are so many cherished ties between a father and his children, they must needs choose the most hateful of all,—the one by virtue of which he chastises them.

"Thereupon Morellet the stern, Suard the pallid, Parny the erotic, Naigeon the atheist, and others, all quoting Scripture and all shouting at once, attacked me with quotations and joined forces against me, according to their custom. Then I got excited in my turn, and told them that their quotations were worthy of pedants and school-teachers, and that, even if I were alone in my opinion, I would maintain it against them all. They took a vote, all raising their hands in the air, and, when they applauded their very large majority, I told them that I challenged their competency because they were all bachelors."

To be a bachelor was, in his eyes, a vice, and of the greatest detriment; he had by instinct the morals of the Patriarchs. Even when he is most kindly treated and made much of on his trips to Paris, when every one caresses him and tries to detain him, Bernardin sighs none the less for his country solitude. He feels that life is flying, that the last pages that he has to write are calling him away, and he writes ingenuously to his young wife:

"I am like the beetle in the grain-field, living happily with his family in the shadow of the harvest; but if a ray of the rising sun makes the emerald and gold of his wings glisten, then the children spy him out, lay hands on him, shut him up in a little cage, and suffocate him with sweets and flowers, thinking to make him happier by their caresses than he was in nature's bosom."

Thus Bernardin lived and grew old, not unhappily,

[1] "It is the father's place to chastise his children."

in his retirement at Eragny. There he put the finishing touches to his last book, *Les Harmonies,* which was not published until after his death, in 1814. He ceased to live on January 21st of that year. *Les Harmonies* presents some very beautiful pictures, as beautiful as in any of his earlier works, but it is marked also by all the exaggerations of theory and style natural to the author, in which his old age took especial delight. He rejects no dream, provided that it coincides ever so little with his views, and he abandons himself to it thenceforth, with method and at the same time with a sort of frenzy; we find ourselves in the very heart of the mysticism of nature. For instance, among other astounding enormities, he says this, without a quaver, on the subject of the sun:

"If it were permissible for a being of such limited powers as myself to venture to extend his speculations to a planet which I have not even had the good fortune to look at through a telescope, I should say *that its substance must be gold,* in the first place because gold is the heaviest of all known substances, which is most appropriate for the sun, occupying the centre of our universe."

The perusal of *Les Harmonies,* if prolonged, produces a singular effect, which I cannot express better than by saying that it is enervating and that it turns the stomach. The best reading after laying this book aside, the most direct antidote to take, is Pascal, who causes the eternal spirit of contradiction in man to cry aloud at every instant, and who, in his powerful and unadorned language, is the least Asiatic of writers.

From this very imperfect study, which, however, is based upon more reading and more comparisons than I have been able to adduce here, it seems to me to result that Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, in his life, was only half a sage, and that, in his writings, he went astray almost as often as he hit the mark. But on one occasion he had a simple and perfect inspiration, he followed it with docility and produced it in its entirety, as if under the sun's rays; therein he deserved that his memory should remain for ever distinct and be constantly renewed, and that around that masterpiece, *Paul et Virginie,* literary interest should collect every one of the widely dispersed charms of the writer.

Frederick the Great.

1712–1786.

Frederick the Great.

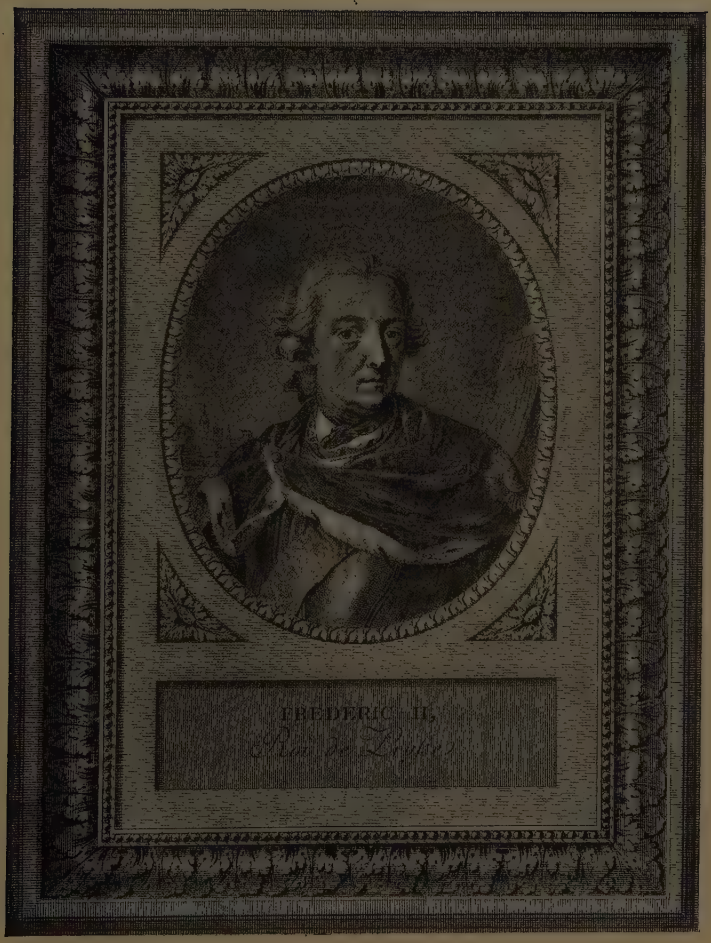
THE writings of Frederick have not heretofore[1] obtained the high esteem that they deserve. It has been the fashion to make sport of some wretched verses written by that poetry-mad prince, which are no worse, after all, than much verse of the same time which was considered delightful then, and which cannot be read to-day; and too little attention has been paid to the serious works of the great man, who would not resemble other great men if he had not actually affixed his seal to the numerous pages of politics and history which he wrote, and which form an immense whole. As for Frederick's letters, more justice has been done them; on reading in Voltaire's correspondence those which the king addressed to him mingled with those that he received in reply, we find not only that they bear the proximity quite well, but that, in all fairness, they are marked by a superiority of insight and of sense which is due to strength of mind and of character. To-day it behooves us to lay aside once for all these petty ideas of a rhetoric far too literary in its essence, in order that we

[1] [Written in 1850.—Tr.]

may recognise the king and the man in the writer, and salute in him one of the best historians that we possess.

I say "we," for Frederick wrote in French, he thought in French, his mind was often upon the French people, and it was to them that he applied, to be read, even when he penned opinions and narratives of events which were so unlikely to be pleasant reading to them. As a prose writer Frederick is a disciple of our best authors, and in history he is a pupil, and assuredly a unique and original pupil, of the historian of the *Siècle de Louis XIV.*

Despite the injury that he inflicted upon himself by certain of his rhapsodies and his speeches, by the ostentatious cynicism of his impiety and his ill-timed pleasantry, and by the mania for versifying that always arouses a smile, Frederick was a truly great man, one of those rare geniuses who are manifestly born to be the leaders and guides of nations. When we divest his personality of all the anecdotic nonsense which is the favourite feast of frivolous minds, and go straight to the man and his character, we pause with a sentiment of admiration and respect; we recognise instantly and at every step that we take in his company a superior and a master, steadfast, sensible, practical, active, and unwearying; with sufficient originality to keep pace with his needs; discerning, never deceived, deceiving as little as possible, constant in all sorts of fortune, overcoming his private affections and his



FREDERICK THE GREAT.

After the drawing by Van Loo.

passions by his ardent patriotism and his zeal for the grandeur and usefulness of his nation; enamoured of glory while estimating it at its true value; careful and vigilant, and desirous of the betterment, the honour, and the well-being of the peoples intrusted to his care, although he has little esteem for mankind in general.

As a captain it is not for me to judge him; but if I rightly understand Napoleon's remarks upon Frederick's campaigns, and the simple narrative of Frederick himself, it seems to me that he was not a warrior before all else. In that respect there is nothing resplendent, nothing captivating about him at first sight. Often beaten, often at fault, his grandeur consisted in learning by dint of schooling, and above all in repairing his errors, or those of fortune, by coolness, tenacity, and an imperturbable equanimity. However warmly good judges may praise his battle of Leuthen, and some of his great manœuvres and operations, they find still more to criticise on many and many an occasion. "He was especially great at critical moments," said Napoleon; "that is the noblest praise that we can bestow upon his character."

This moral strength is what stands out in Frederick more distinctly than his soldierly abilities, and will always remain far superior to them; he was a finely tempered soul and a noble spirit, who applied himself to war because he was obliged to, and not because he was a born warrior. He had neither the rapid and

overwhelming valour of a Gustavus Adolphus or a Condé, nor that transcendent geometrical talent which characterised Napoleon, and which that mighty genius applied to war with the same ease and the same amplitude of range with which Monge applied it to other subjects. Endowed with a superior mind, and with a temperament and a will in harmony with his mind, Frederick devoted himself to military science as he did to many other things; and he very soon excelled in it, mastered it, and perfected in his own hands its instruments and methods, although it was not perhaps in his case, at the outset, the vocation of a genius fully adapted to it, and although he was not at first quite in his element.

Nature had made him to reign, first of all, to be a king, with all the qualities which that lofty station demands; and military science being one of the most indispensable of those qualities, he gave his mind to it and mastered it. "One must acquire the spirit of his trade," he wrote jestingly to Voltaire, at the height of the Seven Years' War. That seems to be only a jest, but it is true. In Frederick the will and the temperament guided the mind in everything.

It has been attempted to establish a contradiction between Frederick's spoken and written words as an adept of philosophy, and his acts as king and conqueror. To my mind this contradiction is not so great as some have attempted to make it. I omit from consideration some early efforts and sallies of

Frederick when he was Crown Prince and a very young man; but from the instant that he realised the importance of his rôle as king, I find the whole man in harmony with himself, and I find that he rings true. For example, I cannot discover in his histories a word that he did not justify in his conduct and in his life.

"A prince," he said and thought, "is the first servitor and the first magistrate of the State; he owes it an account of the use that he makes of the taxes; he levies them so that he may be able to defend the State by means of the troops that it maintains; that he may sustain the dignity with which he is invested, reward services and desert, establish in some degree equilibrium between the rich and the debt-ridden, and relieve the unfortunate in every class and of every sort; that he may invest with splendour whatever interests the whole body politic. If the sovereign has an enlightened mind and an upright heart, he will turn all his outlay to the public benefit, and to the greatest advantage of his people."

That is what Frederick really did, in peace, in war, on almost every occasion, and he departed from it as little as was possible. When we have discounted his mistakes, his ambitions, and his personal failings, the sum and substance of his policy are always what we have just read, what he has so well marked out. To judge him as a politician, it is proper to divest ourselves of the French point of view, of French illusions, and of such influence as the Choiseul ministry may still possess among us. Open Frederick's *Mémoires* once more; in writing them he makes no attempt to gloss over the truth. I know no man who is less of a charlatan, with his pen in hand, than he; he gives

his reasons and does not colour them in the least. "A borrowed rôle is difficult to sustain," he thought; "one is never comfortable except in one's own proper person." While writing the history of his family, under the title of *Mémoires de Brandebourg,* he gives us the first inspiration, the meaning, and the key of his acts. Prussia did not really reach the point of counting for anything in the world, and of putting, as he expresses it, her *grain* in the political balance of Europe, until the time of the Great Elector, the contemporary of the glorious days of Louis XIV. In telling the story of that clever and gallant sovereign, who "was gifted with the power to combine the courage and the meritorious qualities of a great king with the moderate fortune of an elector"; in what he says of that prince, "the honour and glory of his family, the defender and restorer of the fatherland," who was far greater than his surroundings, and from whom his posterity date their beginnings, we feel that Frederick has found his ideal and his model: what the Great Elector was as a simple prince and member of the Empire, he would fain be as king.

That title of king, which was first given to the Great Elector's son, and only as a matter of favour, seemed rather to have depressed the Prussian name than to have exalted it. The first Frederick who bore it, a slave of ceremonial and etiquette, had made the title of Majesty almost ridiculous in his person; he was crushed by it. This first King of Prussia, by his

whole life of vain pomp and ostentation, said unwittingly to his posterity: "I have acquired the title, and I am proud of it; it is for you to make yourselves worthy of it." Frederick's father, of whom his son, whom he so maltreated, spoke so admirably and in a tone, not filial, but truly royal and magnanimous,—that vulgar, saving, niggardly father, torturer of his own children, and idolatrous worshipper of discipline,—a man of merit nevertheless, with "a laborious mind in a robust body,"—had restored to the Prussian State the strength which the grandiloquence and vanity of the first king had caused it to lose. But this was not enough: Frederick's father, an estimable man near at hand in many respects, was not respected at a distance; his very moderation and the simplicity of his manners had injured him. His eighty thousand troops were considered to be kept merely for show,—a corporal's mania for empty ostentation. Prussia was not reckoned among the Powers, and when Frederick, at the age of twenty-eight (1740), ascended that throne which he was destined to occupy for forty-six years, he had everything to do for the nation's honour and his own; he had to create Prussian honour, he had to win his spurs as king.

His first thought was that "a prince must compel respect for his own person, and above all for his nation; that moderation is a virtue which statesmen should not always practise strictly, because of the corruption of the age; and that, upon a change of

reign, it is more fitting to give proofs of firmness than of mildness." He thought also, and he tells us frankly, that :

"Frederick I. [his grandfather], when he raised Prussia to a kingdom, had, by virtue of that empty grandeur, planted the seed of ambition in his posterity, which must germinate sooner or later. The monarchy that he left to his descendants was, if I may so express myself [it is still Frederick who is speaking], a sort of *hermaphrodite,* which had more of the character of an electorate than of a kingdom. There was glory to be won in deciding which it should be; and that feeling was surely one of those which strengthened the king in the great enterprises to which so many motives impelled him."

He tells us what those motives were, and why he anticipated the house of Austria, instead of waiting for it to act and allowing himself to be beaten or humbled. He explains later with the same clearness and frankness the reasons which led him to take the initiative in the Seven Years' War, and decided him to appear to be the aggressor when he was not. These reasons, all derived from the best interests of his cause and his people, contain nothing that seems inconsistent with Frederick's maxims and his favourite ideas, both as philosopher and as writer. Knowing, as he knew, the men and affairs of this world, he realised that it is not allowable to be a bit of a philosopher on the throne until one has demonstrated that he knows how to be something very different. He was not of a temperament to play the devil-may-care rôle of a Stanislas. In order to be in greater security the shepherd of his people, he began by

showing other nations that he was a lion. Whatever he wished to do, he did; he defined boldly the position and functions of Prussia, created a counterpoise to the house of Austria, and made of Northern Germany a centre of civilisation, of culture, and of toleration. It is for his successors to maintain it, and to be loyal, if they can, to his spirit.

All those who have spoken in praise of Frederick have always made an exception of his conduct in respect to Poland and the partition of 1773, which he incited, and by which he profited. On this point I shall beg leave to be silent, the question of Poland not being one of those which can be treated comfortably and with entire impartiality. There is in the very name of Poland and in the misfortunes which are connected with it a remnant of magic which sets men's minds aflame. Frederick, by the way, never varied in his opinion of the character of the Poles as a nation; that opinion is forcibly expressed in a dozen passages of his histories, long before the idea of partition was born.

Under the circumstances, however, and however much truth there may have been in the motives which he himself set forth in all their nakedness, he violated what the ancients called "the conscience of the human race," and he took part in one of those scandalous deeds which always shake the confidence of peoples in the laws that protect society. He forgot his own maxim: "The reputation of a knave is as

injurious to the prince himself as it is disadvantageous to his interests." But in this case the momentous interests of the present and the future, and the natural instinct of aggrandisement, carried him away. And therein he was not so inconsistent as one might think. His sense of delicacy as a philosopher was not so refined that it could not reconcile itself to such political measures. With comparatively equitable, and even humane sentiments, Frederick absolutely lacked idealism, as did his whole age; he did not believe in anything that was of superior worth to himself. He guided and overlooked most energetically the men who were intrusted to his care; he staked his honour and his dignity upon the performance of that duty; but he based it upon no higher motive. And there we touch upon the radical defect of this sagacity of Frederick's—I mean irreverence, *irreligion*. We are familiar with the cynical mockery of his conversation and his letters; he had the capital fault, for a king, of jesting and making sport of everything, even of God. Love of glory was the only theme upon which he never jested.[1]

[1] A most competent judge, one of M. Preuss's collaborators in editing Frederick's works, M. Charles de La Harpe, writes me on the subject of this sentence: "There are two other subjects on which he never jested,—love of the fatherland, and friendship. That quizzical hero was the most affectionate and most loyal of friends, and every one knows that his passionate love for his country was so intense that he deprived himself of everything in order to obtain the means of relieving the sufferings of his subjects and of endowing Prussia with beneficial institutions."

Strange inconsistency of a noble nature! for if the human race is so stupid and so deserving of contempt, and if there is nothing nor anybody above it, why devote oneself, body and soul, to the dream of glory, which is nothing else than desire and expectation of the highest esteem among men? It is incredible that, viewing everything, as he did, from the higher standpoint of the State and of the interest of society, Frederick should have looked upon religion as one of those neutral grounds, where people can agree to meet for after-dinner recreation and persiflage. He forgot that he himself, writing to Voltaire, said: "Every man has a savage beast within himself; few know how to secure him, the majority let go the curb when fear of the laws does not restrain them." His nephew, William of Brunswick, ventured one day to call his attention to the inconsistency of relaxing thus the religious bonds which hold the savage beast in check. "Oh!" rejoined Frederick, "against criminals I have the hangman, and that is enough."

Even if we leave the interest of the sovereign out of the account, it is distasteful to see a great man debase himself by jests of this sort, aimed at objects that are venerable in the eyes of the great majority; it was in a certain sense a violation of that hospitable toleration upon which he prided himself, thus to express aloud his contempt for what he pretended to welcome and tolerate. It has a savour of innate lack of refinement and of northern vulgarity, and a critic

was justified in saying, with merited severity, of Frederick's letters, "There are some vigorous and noble thoughts, but beside them may be seen stains of beer and tobacco-juice on these pages of Marcus Aurelius."

I propose to say no more of Frederick to-day except as a historian. His histories consist of the *Mémoires de Brandebourg*, which contain all that it is important to know of the annals of Prussia prior to his accession, and of four other works which contain the history of his times and his reign, from 1740 to 1778. The history of the Seven Years' War is one of these four, the one by virtue of which he takes his place naturally between Napoleon and Cæsar.

The *Mémoires de Brandebourg* alone appeared in his lifetime. From the preface it is apparent that we have to do with a lofty and resolute mind, which has the noblest and soundest ideas upon the subject treated. "A man who does not believe that he has fallen from the skies," he says, "who does not date the beginning of the world from the day of his birth, should be curious to learn what has taken place in all times and in all lands." Every man ought at least to be interested in what has taken place before his time in the land wherein he dwells. In order that this knowledge should be of real benefit, one condition is indispensable,—truth. Frederick insists upon truth in history. "A work written without perfect freedom can be only mediocre or bad." So that he proposes to tell the truth

about people, about others' ancestors as well as his own. But he considers it his duty to record only what is memorable or useful on every subject. He has nothing to say upon matters of mere curious interest. He leaves it to professors in *us,* enamoured of the trivialities of erudition, to find out of what material the coat of Albert, surnamed Achilles, was made. He is decidedly of the opinion that "a thing does not deserve to be written except in so far as it deserves to be remembered."

He runs rapidly over the barbarous, barren days, and over those of his ancestors of whom we know only the names or some anecdotes devoid of significance. "These are some histories," he says, "like rivers, which become important only when they begin to be navigable." He chooses French in preference to any other language, because "it is," he says, "the most refined language in Europe and the most widely known, and because it seems to be in some measure made stable by the excellent authors of the reign of Louis XIV." He might have added,—"and because it is best adapted to express the thoughts of a lucid, sensible, and determined genius."

When he comes to the period of the Reformation, of the Thirty Years' War, the historian-king defines in a few words those momentous events by their general features and in their real essence; always and everywhere he distinguishes the substance from the mere accessories. When he falls in with the horrors of

devastation which mark those depressing periods of history, he manifests sentiments of humanity and of orderly government, in which there is no affectation and which he afterwards put in practice.

I have said that the type that he sets before himself, the man from whom he justly dates the real grandeur of his house, is Frederick William, called the Great Elector,—the man who took Brandenburg in hand, at the end of the disastrous Thirty Years' War, "which had transformed the electorate into a ghastly desert, where the villages could be recognised only by the heaps of ashes which prevented the grass from growing there." He dilates upon that reign with pleasure; he even goes so far as to venture to draw a parallel between that princeling of the North and Louis XIV in his glory; aside from two or three rather ornate and too mythological passages, and aside from a slightly oratorical tone that is apparent here and there, this comparison constitutes a noble page of history, and a passage of genuine elevation of mind.

It is to be observed that Frederick, when he has his pen in hand, while he is always exact, is less grave than Cæsar, or even than Napoleon; he does not forbid himself the display of talent, properly so-called, especially in this first history, of which Gibbon was able to say that it was "well written." Having to describe the campaign of 1679, during which the Great Elector, in midwinter, drove out the Swedes who had invaded Prussia, he says: "The retreat of the

Swedes resembled a rout; of sixteen thousand scarcely three returned to Livonia. They entered Prussia like Romans, they went thence like Tartars."

His judgment of men is profound and decisive. He has an evident penchant for heroes; he speaks always with respect, and with an instinctive feeling of noble fraternity, of the Gustavus Adolphuses, the Marlboroughs, and the Eugenes; but he does not misapprehend real grandeur, and is never lavish of the word. Queen Christina, with her whimsical abdication, seems to him simply "odd"; the duel between Charles XII and Peter the Great at Pultowa seems to him a duel between "the two strongest men of their age." Foreigner as he is, he has the art to select his words with an accuracy which measures the language or bends it to his thought.

To depict the characters of statesmen, of ministers, he employs lofty and authoritative expressions of the sort that are historical in anticipation and that engrave themselves upon the memory. The portraits of people whom he has known and handled are dashed off with the hand of a master, and as if by one who was quick, or even predisposed, to seize upon vices or absurdities. To give an idea of General von Seckendorff, who served the Emperor and Saxony at the same time, he said: "He was sordidly selfish; his manners were vulgar and countrified; falsehood was so habitual to him that he had lost the use of the truth. He had the soul of a usurer, which passed sometimes

into the body of a soldier, and again into that of a negotiator." And observe that this is not in the shape of a portrait, as in some histories, more or less literary, where the historian poses before his model; it is said *au courant,* as by a historian by profession who thinks aloud.

When he approaches the affairs of his own time, those in which he had a share, and which he directed, Frederick maintains the same tone, or, rather, he assumes an even simpler tone than in his history of Brandenburg. In speaking of himself he is neither overweening nor modest; he is true. In speaking of others, even his greatest enemies, he is just. At the beginning of his reign, in telling the story of the conquest of Silesia, which aroused so much wrath, and which succeeded so entirely to his satisfaction, he exposes his motives without disguise; he points out his mistakes, and his *schooling* in war. Side by side with the measures and schemes dictated by far-sighted audacity, he recognises what he owes to "opportunity, that fruitful mother of great events," and he is careful to assign on every occasion due credit to fortune.

"The thing that contributed most effectively to that conquest," he says, "was an army which had been trained for twenty-two years by admirable discipline, and was superior to all the rest of the soldiery of Europe [*observe the compliment to his father*]; generals who were loyal citizens, wise and incorruptible ministers, and lastly a certain amount of good luck which often waits upon youth and denies itself to advanced age. If this great undertaking had failed, the king would have been looked upon as a reckless prince who had undertaken something beyond his strength; its success caused him to be looked upon

as no less skilful than lucky. In reality it is luck alone that decides a man's reputation; he whom it favours is applauded; he whom it spurns is blamed."

The history of the Seven Years' War is admirable in its simplicity and its fidelity to truth. The author does not confine himself to the general result of the strategical operations, he includes a sketch of all the Courts of Europe during that period. In his narrative of the events of the war he is grave and expeditious, passing over special details except in a small number of cases where he cannot refrain from paying a tribute of gratitude to his brave troops or to some gallant comrade in arms. I commend to the reader the sixth chapter, which deals with the campaign of 1757, that campaign so replete with vicissitudes and changes of fortune, in which Frederick, driven to bay, won his easy and brilliant victory at Rosbach, and his scientific and *classical* victory at Leuthen. If we supplement his noble and fluent narrative with the letters that he wrote to Voltaire during the same time, we shall be present at the most splendid moment of Frederick's career, at the crisis from which he emerged with the most heroic and glorious perseverance. In that crisis it is that we really recognise the philosopher and the stoic in the man of war. The most severe criticism that he ever made upon the House of Austria was that "it followed the brutish impulses of nature; swollen with pride in prosperity and crawling in the dust in adversity, it has never succeeded in attaining

that judicious moderation which makes man impassive to good and evil alike, as chance may decree." For his own part he is determined never to yield, even in the greatest extremity, to chance or to brute nature, and so to persevere in the path marked out by great souls as to make Fortune blush for shame at last.

At the conclusion of that war in which so much blood was shed, and after which everything in Germany was replaced on the same footing as before, devastation and ruin excepted, Frederick is pleased to insist upon the feebleness and vanity of human plans. "Does it not seem surprising," he says, "that the most subtle human prudence, combined with force, is so often deceived by unexpected events or strokes of fortune; and does it not seem that there is a certain indefinable something which scornfully makes sport of the schemes of mankind?" We recognise in this a reminiscence of Lucretius in some of his noblest lines:

"Usque adeo res humanas vis abdita quaedam."

I have tried thus far to exhibit Frederick, the king and politician, in his highest and most impassioned form,—the Frederick of history, not of anecdote. It was so that he himself thought that great men should be definitively judged, without wasting time over mere accessories, but occupying a standpoint high enough to overlook their contradictions and oddities. However, Frederick's domestic and private life is fully

known; every part of his character stands in the light; we have his letters, his poetry, his pamphlets, sallies and jests, his confidences of every sort; he did nothing to suppress them, and it is impossible not to discover in him another most essential personality, which goes to the very heart of the man. We may say that, if the great king was *lined* with a philosopher, his individuality was further complicated with a man of letters.

The great Cardinal de Richelieu was of the same type: to write a fine tragedy would have been almost as sweet to his heart, and would have seemed almost as glorious an achievement as triumphing over the Spaniards and supporting the allies of France in Germany; the laurels of *Le Cid* kept him from sleeping. After the Seven Years' War, when d'Alembert visited Frederick at Potsdam and spoke to him of his glory, "he said to me," writes d'Alembert, "with the utmost simplicity, that there was a tremendous discount to be made from that same glory; that chance was responsible for almost everything, and that he would have preferred to have written *Athalie* rather than to have fought that war." There is certainly something of the philosopher in this way of looking upon military triumphs; but there is also something of the man of letters in this preference for *Athalie*. I am not sure that Frederick would not have taken it back if some mischievous genie had taken him at his word and he had been forced to choose between the

Seven Years' War and *Athalie;* or, rather, I am quite sure that the king would, in the end, have carried the day; but the heart of the poet would have bled internally, and it is enough for the purpose of our interpretation of his character, that he might have hesitated even for an instant.

When we study Frederick in his writings, in his correspondence (especially in that with Voltaire), we observe, it seems to me, one fact that rests on strong evidence: there was in him a man of letters antedating all the rest, even the king. What he was by nature before everything else, and, if one may so express it, most artlessly of all, was a man of letters, a dilettante, a virtuoso, with an ardent love of the arts and with a passionate adoration of intellect. He had only to abandon himself to his own inclinations, to expand in that direction.

His station as king, his love of eminent renown, and the noble character with which he was endowed, diverted his energies in other directions, which aimed at achieving the social welfare and the grandeur of his people; he considered that "a good mind is susceptible of all sorts of forms, that it brings to whatever it undertakes a disposition to do its best. It is like a Proteus, who changes his shape without difficulty and seems to be in reality the object that he represents." Thus, he seems to have been born for all that he would have to do as king; he was equal to his task. "The strength of a State," he thought,

"consists in the great men whom Nature causes to be born therein at the opportune moment." He desired to be, and he was, one of those great men; he worthily performed his rôle of hero. The nation which the Great Elector had roughly sketched, he completed the construction of; he gave it a body and imprinted upon it unity of spirit; Prussia did not really exist until she came forth from his hands. Such was the rôle of Frederick the Great in history; but in reality, his secret taste (it can hardly be called secret), his real delight, was to argue on every subject, to follow out his philosophical ideas and also to put them on paper, sometimes seriously, sometimes in sport, as a rhymester and as a writer.

He was educated by a Frenchman, a man of merit, named Duhan, who implanted in him a love of our language and our literature. The thirst for glory, which Frederick's youthful heart cherished, naturally led him to turn his eyes toward France. The age of Louis XIV, now at an end, was gradually extending its influence over the whole of Europe. Brandenburg was lagging behind the other nations; there was nothing surprising in that, but Frederick felt humiliated, and said to himself that it was time for him to inaugurate the new era of regeneration in the North. So long as his father lived, this purely literary aspiration of Frederick prevailed over his other ideas and impelled him to measures, to overtures, wherein the future king forgot himself more or less.

As we have seen heretofore,[1] Frederick was twenty-eight years of age, and Crown Prince of Prussia, when he began his correspondence with Voltaire.

One delights to find, amid the insipidities and exaggerations, sometimes ridiculous enough, of the early part of this correspondence, more than one passage in which we may already detect the king that is to be, the man of superior mould, who, although he has the craze for rhyming and for publishing his first works, will be able to master it by means of a nobler passion, and who will never be a mere prattler on the throne. In everything, even in these diversions of the mind, Frederick always ends by giving the last word to action, to social utility, and the welfare of his fatherland; his genius is merely amusing itself while awaiting something better, and will continue to amuse itself and make merry in the intervals of sterner tasks; but will aspire, at all times, by dint of steadfast application, to make itself effective in practical and beneficial grandeur. There is a time for him to laugh, to play on the flute, to write poetry, and a time to reign. The man of letters may outweigh the king for some time and gambol before him, but only to give way to him whenever it is necessary, at the precise moment. We may say that no one of his talents, of his passions, or even of his manias, ever encroached upon one of his duties.

[1] [See vol. i., pp. 212-221, for Sainte-Beuve's discussion of the correspondence between Frederick and Voltaire.—Tr.]

From the standpoint of taste there are many things to be noticed. The rough and somewhat coarse nature of the Vandal makes itself felt in Frederick, even through the man of intellect and the dilettante eager to be instructed and to please. It is not alone that language and the fitting expression sometimes fail him,—often the refined touch is lacking. Whenever he mentions Madame du Châtelet to Voltaire, he has much difficulty in not appearing coarse or absurd. "I have too much respect for the bonds of friendship," he writes to him at Cirey, "to desire to tear you from *Émilie's arms.*" When he tries to be gallant, his conduct is marked by the same puerility. He can think of no more graceful compliment than to send Voltaire as a gift a bust of Socrates, the long-suffering sage *par excellence;* which might have seemed intended for an epigram, if he had known his poet better at the time. But Socrates reminds Frederick of Alcibiades, whence more than one equivocal and *risqué* allusion, into which, by the way, Voltaire does not disdain to enter. It required some time for that rough diamond to get rid of its dross.

However, Frederick speedily formed himself; he is taking shape perceptibly in this correspondence, and there comes a time when he has mastered his French prose and handles it in such fashion as really to hold his own with Voltaire. As for verse-writing, we must needs despair of him; in that direction his voice will always be raucous and harsh, and he will never

improve. Let us have done with the subject of poetising. He was very well aware that the mania was a weakness in him and almost an absurdity; that people praised him to his face only to call him *Cotin*[1] behind his back. "This man," said Voltaire one day, pointing to a pile of papers belonging to the king, "this man, do you see, is Cæsar and Abbé Cotin combined." An eminent English historian, Lord Macaulay, improving upon this conceit, has called Frederick a compound of Mithridates and Trissotin.

Frederick knew or foresaw all this, and yet he yielded to his ardour for making rhymes. When he was very young, he fell madly in love with a young woman who loved poetry, and it was then that he was stung by the scorpion; and, although he was thoroughly cured of one disease (that of loving young women), he was never cured of the other. It would be impossible to say anything to him by way of remonstrance or reproach that he did not say to himself a hundred times. "I am unfortunate enough to love verses," he wrote, "and frequently to compose some execrable ones. The thing that ought to disgust me with them, and that would repel any sensible person, is the very spur that most incites me. I say to myself, 'You poor little wretch! you have

[1] [Charles Cotin (1604–1682), a French ecclesiastic and author, and member of the Académie. Having incurred the enmity of Boileau, he was held up to ridicule by him, and especially by Molière, who satirised him in *Les Femmes Savantes,* in the character of Trissotin.—Tr.]

never succeeded as yet; courage!'" Elsewhere he says: "Whoever is not a poet at twenty will never become a poet as long as he lives. No man who was not born a Frenchman, or who has not lived in Paris for a long time, can possess the language in the degree of perfection that is necessary to write good poetry or elegant prose." He compares himself to the vines "which always smell of the earth in which they are planted." But, for all that, it amuses him, it diverts him and relaxes his mind in the intervals of momentous affairs; and so he will go on rhyming to the very end.

He also composed music in the Italian style,—solos by the hundred,—and he played the flute to perfection, it is said; which did not deter Diderot from saying, "It 's a great pity that the mouthpiece of that beautiful flute is stopped up by grains of Brandenburg sand."

Frederick was an excellent judge of historians, who were his special material for study and meditation; but, when we find him lavishing the title of Thucydides on Rollin or even on Voltaire, we are compelled to admit that he seems to have no conception of the peculiar historical style which constitutes the originality of that great historian. He was better fitted to judge Polybius, in whom matter predominates over style. A critic of real merit (M. Egger) suggests to me that there are some genuine and quite striking similarities. The reflections with which Frederick brings to

a close his history of the Seven Years' War strongly resemble a page of Polybius: "At a distance of two thousand years there is the same method of viewing human vicissitudes, and of explaining them as games of skill blended with games of chance." But the historian-king is, generally speaking, more serious in his reflections.

German literature is barely mentioned by Frederick; he fully realises its failings, which were without compensation at that time,—heaviness, diffuseness, division into dialects,—and he points out some of the remedies. He prophesies, however, the national literature of the glorious days that are drawing near: "I announce their coming, they will soon appear." He does not seem to suspect that they had, in truth, begun to dawn toward the end of his life, and that Goethe had already arrived. But can we wonder that Frederick did not appreciate *Werther?*

Frederick's relations with d'Alembert were of an entirely different character from his intimacy with Voltaire; they were never so intense, but they were enduring and stable. It was not simply a natural predilection that drew Frederick toward d'Alembert. "We princes," said the former, "are always led by self-interest, and we never make acquaintances unless we have some particular object in view, which tends directly to our advantage." Frederick at an early day conceived the project of inducing d'Alembert to come to Berlin, in order to make him president of his Acad-

emy. This project he considered more seriously after the death of Maupertuis, and when he had seen the last of the Seven Years' War. I have before me the unpublished manuscript collection of letters written by d'Alembert to Mademoiselle de Lespinasse during his visit to the King of Prussia. In June, 1763, he joined Frederick, who was then in his province of Westphalia, at Gueldres, and made the journey to Potsdam in his suite. D'Alembert had met the king several years earlier; on seeing him again he was amazed to find him superior even to his renown. Frederick had the characteristic peculiar to great men, that the first sight always exceeded anticipation. He began by talking with d'Alembert for four hours in succession; he talked simply and modestly, of philosophy, literature, peace, war, and all sorts of things. At that time, only three months after the conclusion of peace, Frederick had already rebuilt forty-five hundred houses in ruined villages; two years later (October, 1765), he had rebuilt no less than fourteen thousand five hundred.

We remark first of all, as d'Alembert did, this administrative and even pacific side in the man of war. The amiable, familiar, and fascinating side is clearly indicated in this narrative of our traveller: the sagacious and unassuming guest had neither the time nor the desire to observe faults which often impaired that groundwork of wisdom and charm. Moreover, honours did not turn d'Alembert's head; he was touched,

but not intoxicated. When he passed through Brunswick, he dined at the table of the ducal family, and they called him "Marquis"; he submitted to the title after a faint remonstrance. Apparently, he said, that was the etiquette. With Frederick there is no etiquette, and everything goes off as with a private individual who is also a genius. D'Alembert would have had to exert himself very little to become necessary to Frederick by his conversation, just as Frederick was to d'Alembert. It was no longer the period of the brilliant supper-parties at Potsdam, the last fine days of which Voltaire had seen and, indeed, been instrumental in producing; the habitual guests of those days, the friends of the king's youth, were dead or very old at this second period. Not only was the king the most attractive man in his realm; if we except Lord Marischal, he was the only one. "He is almost the only person in the kingdom," says d'Alembert, "with whom one can converse,—at least in this sort of conversation of which we know almost nothing in France, and which becomes a necessity when one is once familiar with it."

All Frederick's excellent qualities are made prominent in this narrative; and d'Alembert, always circumspect, is careful to see no others during his three months' sojourn. He is able, however, to resist the king's flattery and his delicate offers of service. One day, when they were walking in the gardens of Sans-Souci, Frederick plucked a rose and presented it to

him, saying: "I would be very glad to give you something better." This "something better" was the presidency of his Academy; it is curious to see the presidency of an academy and a rose thus brought into juxtaposition. D'Alembert retains his prudence, he remains the philosopher and friend to the end, and loyal to Mademoiselle de Lespinasse. He returns to France, grateful, won over to Frederick for ever, so far as his heart is concerned, but not conquered.

The whole truth must be told: several years later, Frederick was showing some verses of his one evening to Professor Thiébault, an excellent grammarian and academician whom d'Alembert had secured for him; and he carelessly allowed himself to produce a very pungent epigram which he had written against d'Alembert himself; the satirical monarch had been unable to deny himself the malign pleasure of commemorating some absurd foible that he had observed in that honourable character. That was a capital failing of Frederick's: he found it hard to refrain from making unpleasant remarks to people and from writing sharp things about them. In the present case he speedily repented of having shown Thiébault his epigram, and he enjoined silence upon him; the excellent d'Alembert never knew anything about it. But, surrounded as he was, in his intimate circle, by would-be clever courtiers, all more or less dull of wit, Frederick was less scrupulous with regard to them. As soon as he had discovered their weak

points, he thrust at them pitilessly through the loose joints of their cuirass; he made them his butts, he practised at displaying his contempt for mankind upon them, and thus acquired a reputation for cruelty, when it was, in reality, nothing more than scathing criticism of society at large.

After his return to France d'Alembert continued to correspond with Frederick; and, if we forget the epigram which was never made public, the correspondence on both sides gives evidence of sound sense, of genuine philosophy, and even of friendship, so far as friendship could exist in those days between a private individual and a monarch. D'Alembert, too, we must not forget, had his failings; we know already that the philosophers of the eighteenth century had little fondness for the liberty of the press except when it was at their disposition. One day d'Alembert was insulted by some journalist or other who conducted the *Courrier du Bas-Rhin,* in Frederick's own dominion. He denounced him to the King. On this occasion it is Frederick who is the true philosopher, the true citizen of modern society, when he replies:

"I know that a Frenchman, a compatriot of yours, smears two sheets of paper with ink at Clèves every week; I know that people buy his sheet, and that an ass can always find a greater ass to read him; but I have much difficulty in convincing myself that a writer of that stamp can have any prejudicial effect on your reputation. Ah! my dear d'Alembert, if you were King of England, you would endure many worse taunts with which your faithful subjects would supply you, to test your patience. If you knew what a multitude of infamous screeds your dear compatriots put forth against me during the

war, you would laugh at this wretched penny-a-liner. I did not deign to read all the outpourings of my enemies' hatred and envy, but I remembered Horace's fine ode: 'The wise man remains immovable.'" . . .

And he proceeds to paraphrase the *Justum ac tenacem.*

In this admirable lecture we recognise the disciple of Bayle on the throne. Another day it will be the disciple of Lucretius. D'Alembert is in distress, in profound and perfectly natural distress: he has lost Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, he is about to lose Madame Geoffrin. That geometrician's heart, so susceptible of affection, does not hesitate to pour itself out on Frederick's breast, to find a vent for its sorrows there, and almost to sob aloud; and the king replies like a friend and like a wise man, with two or three letters of philosophical consolation, which should be quoted in full. An exalted and affectionate epicureanism breathes therein, the epicureanism of a Lucretius addressing his friend:

"I am sorry for the misfortune which has befallen you, of losing a person to whom you were attached. The wounds of the heart are the most sensitive of all wounds, and despite the fine maxims of the philosophers, nothing but time can heal them. *Man is an animal more sensitive than reasoning.* I have, to my misery, had only too much experience of the suffering caused by such losses. The best remedy is to put compulsion upon one's self in order to divert one's mind from a painful vein of thought which is likely to take too deep root. You should choose some geometrical investigation which demands constant application, in order to keep back, so far as it is posble to do so, the gloomy thoughts which incessantly recur to the mind. I would suggest more effective remedies if I knew any such, Cicero,

to console himself for the death of his dear Tullia, threw himself into composition, and wrote several treatises, some of which have come down to us. Our reason is too weak to overcome the pain of a mortal wound; we must concede something to nature, and above all say to ourselves, that at your age and mine we should be the more readily consoled because we shall not long delay to join the objects of our regrets."

And he urges him to come and pass a few months with him as soon as he can. "We will philosophise together concerning the nothingness of life, concerning the philosophy of men, concerning the vanity of stoicism and of our whole existence." And he adds, with a mixture of warrior-king and philosopher which would seem contradictory if it were not so touching, that "he will feel as happy in allaying his grief as if he had won a battle."

Such letters surely redeem some asperities of style which may be found close beside them, and which remind us at intervals of the master's presence; they are a sufficient answer to those who, judging Frederick by his harsh sayings and his epigrams alone, deny that he ever, from beginning to end, felt any sentiment of affection, of humanity, or, I venture to say, of kindness, just as they deny that he formed any genuine and cordial friendships in his youth. For my part, from whatever side I view him, and even in the years when his failings manifest themselves most distinctly, I can come to no other than a favourable conclusion with respect to him, and I can only say, as Bolingbroke said of Marlborough, "He was such a great man that I have forgotten his vices."

In a select edition of Frederick's works, for the use of healthy minds and people of taste, I would include only his histories, two or three at most of his dissertations, and his correspondence; there would then be enough of his verses, which are scattered through his letters, without adding others. Thus we should have in all about ten volumes of strong, healthy, pleasant, and always instructive reading. Let us lay aside, as applied to Frederick, those names so often repeated, sometimes with insulting, sometimes with flattering intent,—the too equivocal names of the Emperor Julian and Marcus Aurelius. On the other hand, let us not seek out the names of Lucian, of whom he could offer only strange parodies and burlesques; but, if we would define him *classically,* let us define him as being in his best features a writer of the noblest character, whose nature is peculiar to himself, but who, in habits and cast of thought, resembles at the same time Polybius, Lucretius, and Bayle.

Wilhelmina, Margravine of Baireuth.

1709–1758.

Wilhelmina, Margravine of Baireuth.

THE Margravine of Baireuth, a princess of great intellect and worth, Frederick's older sister, and a true sister of his in thought and in heart, married to the Hereditary Prince of Baireuth and sadly out of place in that petty court, set out one day, in order to relieve the tedium of her existence, to write down all the sufferings, all the domestic persecutions, that she had known before, and even after, her marriage. She recurred at various times to this narrative told to herself, and continued it down to the day when she became margravine and when her brother ascended the throne. She had no well-defined design in devoting herself to this means of diverting her thoughts from her solitude.

"I write for my own amusement," she said, "and do not expect that these memoirs will ever be printed; perhaps I may sacrifice them to Vulcan some day, perhaps I shall give them to my daughter[1]; in fact I am a Pyrrhonian on that subject. I say again, I write solely for my own amusement, and I take pleasure in concealing nothing of all that has ever happened to me, even of my most secret thoughts."

[1] Her only daughter, who married the Duke of Würtemberg, and died without issue.

But, while writing down what has happened to her, she tells what others have done, what they have said and plotted; she draws their pictures and shows them without disguise in their intrigues, in their vices, in their capricious or brutish dispositions, in the dense and still uncivilised vulgarity which was the real foundation of their natures. Side by side with the wicked and corrupt ministers at whose hands she had to suffer, she paints her kindred as well, whom she prides herself upon holding in veneration,—the king her father, the queen her mother, several of her sisters, the king her brother, whom she loves devotedly, but of whom she speaks with much bitterness in certain passages, because the last part of her memoirs was written when she was on ill terms with him.

When these memoirs were written, she confided them to a clever man, her physician, M. de Superville, who did not remain in her service. Having given him the manuscript, she forgot it, no doubt; momentous events supervened, which engrossed all the last years of her life. The work slept fifty years and more at the bottom of a casket; after which it was printed (1810), and instantly became, in the eyes of all men, one of those truthful, natural, and terrible productions of the sort that is so dear to Posterity, that great busybody and violator of seals, and of the sort that families have great reason to dread.

The harm has been done, and let us make the most of it. The Margravine of Baireuth, who had had a very

THE MARGRAVINE OF BAIREUTH.
After the painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds.

careful education, who knew the modern languages, history, and literature, and who could have written her memoirs in English as well as in German, wrote them in French, just as she always corresponded with her brother in French. Thus we have in her still another French writer, and a painter-writer altogether worthy of notice. It is interesting, by way of giving oneself the impression of an absolute contrast, but a contrast in which there is nothing offensive, to place her over against a Hamilton or a Caylus painting with malign delicacy the beauties of the Court of Charles II, or those of Marly or Versailles. We may also compare her in our minds to Madame de Staal de Launay, describing for us in her ingenious memoirs the trivialities and elegant crazes of the Court of Sceaux. The Margravine has to deal with a totally different subject-matter which she attacks with less ceremony. One who has not read the book can form no conception of the Gothic and Ostrogothic barbarity which she reveals in her *entourage;* and, superior as she is to her subject, she has something of it in her style, and now and then it casts unpleasant reflections upon her and her manner. This young woman (for she began to write her memoirs at twenty-five) indulges in crudities of expression worthy of Saint-Simon when he is tearing people to tatters; and, from lack of opportunity no doubt, and because she does not know where to bestow it, she never atones by an act of grace.

And yet, if we succeed in mastering the disgust occasioned by the hideous nature of the characters introduced and their intrigues, and by that endless series of enormities and horrors, we shall realise with what raillery, what playfulness, and what happy turns of expression she writes. I will mention simply a portrait of the General-Minister Grumbkow, the hateful persecutor of Frederick and his sister: in his duel with the Prince of Anhalt, she shows him to us terrified and trembling, and recalls all the proofs that he had given of the same temperament, whether at the battle of Malplaquet, where he stayed in a ditch throughout the action, or at the siege of Stralsund, where he most opportunely dislocated a leg at the beginning of the campaign, which excused him from going into the trenches. "He had," she concludes, "the same misfortune as a certain king of France, who could not see a bare sword without falling in a swoon[1]; but, with that exception, he was a very brave general." And elsewhere, describing the king, her father, who could not reconcile himself to the courteous and reserved manners of the Hereditary Prince of Baireuth, although he had selected him for her husband, "he wanted a son-in-law," she says, "who cared for nothing but the military, wine, and saving money."

[1] She was mistaken; no king of France ever had such a faint heart. She refers to James, King of England and Scotland, son of Mary Stuart, who owed that disposition, it is said, to the fact that the murder of Rizzio was done in the presence of his mother when she was pregnant.

Surely, in a society in which we imagine the Cayluses, the Hamiltons, the Grammonts, the Sévignés, the Coulanges, the Saint-Simons, the Staal de Launays, and the Du Deffands gathered together, the Margravine would not have been out of place or embarrassed; she would very soon have found a way to pay her scot by many a shaft of wit and highly seasoned pleasantry, which would have been applauded by all alike, men and women, just as her brother, in conversation, could hold his own with Voltaire or with anybody else in clever repartee. But to one who reads her, having regard to the type and the nature of her pictures, she retains her exotic colouring and her foreign accent. Let us treat her, then, if not as a Frenchwoman in a foreign land, at all events as a friend of France, who, at the height of the Seven Years' War, wrote to the same Voltaire, referring to the French, then her declared foes: "I have a deuce of an affection for them that prevents me from wishing them ill."

But let us understand one thing: the correspondence between her and her brother, which Herr Preuss has lately published, and the notes which that painstaking editor has supplied, prove that, although the *Mémoires* of the Margravine of Baireuth may be sincere, they are not strictly accurate. She wrote them in solitude, and sometimes in ill-humour. She conceals some facts, she changes others, or rather they become changed of themselves in her memory and her

mind, soured by ill-health and too constant disappointments. The system of checks which we are now able to establish between the Margravine's *Mémoires* and her authentic correspondence with Frederick enables us to judge some of her assertions more fairly. Frederick gains thereby, and she herself, although detected in misstatements, does not really lose. In fact, the elevation of heart and nobility of feeling which were inherent in her nature, and which are hidden in the *Mémoires* by the spirit of jesting and satire, make themselves more manifest in the letters: in them the Margravine puts her best and strongest qualities foremost, no longer as the sarcastic painter and caricaturist of her family, but rather as a passionate, loving, and, at need, heroic and noble-hearted woman, devoted to the honour of her house.

Born in 1709, and therefore her brother's senior by three years, she very soon came to love that brother above all things. Employed all day by her teachers, her only recreation was to be with him. "Never did affection equal ours," she says; "he was bright, but his disposition was gloomy; he would think a long while before replying, but, to make up for it, he always answered right. He learned with great difficulty, and we expected that as time went on he would have more good sense than wit." She protected him on all occasions; when the time came for him to study, she spurred him on by shaming him for neglecting his talents; she was his dearest confidante

before he knew what evil was; she was his good genius.

Her own faculties seem to have been in no wise inferior to those of her so illustrious brother. She was of the race of "sisters of genius," who have a share of the same sacred fire from which the famous brother derives his flame, and who keep it pure and bright. Although most happily endowed intellectually, with a mind overflowing with knowledge and flashes of brilliancy, with a wonderful memory, with excellent and honourable principles, with a beautiful soul created for virtue; although she was pretty in her youth, before unhappiness wrecked her life, and adorned with all natural charms; she was nevertheless, from her childhood, one of the most unfortunate, the most cruelly maltreated persons to be found in any rank of society (I do not except the lowest), and she had, so long as she lived, a life of suffering and torment, with very few pleasant moments.

The discord that arose between her parents on the subject of her marriage and her brother's, the selfishness and unintelligence of the queen their mother, the unheard-of violence and credulousness of the king their father, as they led to shocking domestic scenes, compelled the Princess Wilhelmina at a very early age to give herself up to the most melancholy and most profound reflections, and matured her before her time. Destined according to all appearances to ascend a throne, that of England, she was very lukewarm in

her desire for that arrangement and readily consoled herself when it fell through. She was philosophical in the best sense of the word, and, fully realising what she was, and being determined never to descend to anything unworthy of her, she desired before everything a calm and serious life,—study, fine arts and music, and the charms of companionship. After the hours which she employed in working with her estimable governess, Frau von Sonsfeld, whom a special Providence sent to her to replace the detestable Leti, her pleasantest moments, her only pleasant moments, were those that she passed with her brother; and if raillery, satire, and laughter at their neighbours' expense did engross them too frequently, we can but agree that it was a sort of vengeance most pardonable to superior natures surrounded by vulgar, despicable, or evil-minded persons, who persecuted them. In this raillery of the Princess Wilhelmina there was much more of merriment and of an irresistible sense of the ridiculous, than of bitter malice; she never tried to repay to anybody the injuries that she had received from them.

Married by a freak of her father to the Hereditary Prince of Baireuth, with whom she had no previous acquaintance, she always speaks of him with esteem and affection; she loved him, became devotedly attached to him, and had to make no effort to bring her heart into accord with her duties. She was deeply pained by his inconstancy and his infidelities. And yet this conjugal attachment had not the character of a

passion; it was rather her affection for her brother which would have assumed that character and would have become adoration, had not Frederick dealt it more than one blow by his involuntary vehemence and roughness. That passionate affection endured without abatement and without a blemish until Frederick, carried away by the impetuosity of youth, and exasperated by domestic persecution, abandoned himself without restraint to his evil inclinations. She noted the evident changes in her brother's conduct towards her after his absences and his outbursts of wildness. He did her the justice to agree that she did her utmost to induce him to reform.

> "Le vice à son aspect n'osait jamais paraître;
> De mes sens mutinés elle m'a rendu maître;
> C'était par la vertu qu'on plaisait à ses yeux."[1]

These verses are Frederick's and not of his worst.

The letter that opens their correspondence is from Frederick, dated at Küstrin, where he was then confined (November 1, 1730), on the eve of the council of war which his father had convoked to try him. His head was at stake, and his father insisted that the Prussian law relating to deserters should be applied to him. It is a playful letter, calculated to bring a mournful smile to the lips of that courageous sister, who remained so faithful and devoted to him at such an awful crisis.

[1] "When she appeared, vice never dared appear; she taught me to control my unruly passions; only by virtue could one win favour in her sight."

Their father often seems to be in very poor health during the first years, and Frederick on the point of becoming king. The sentiments which they express to each other concerning that dreaded monarch who has caused them so much suffering, and concerning his approaching demise, are what we may expect from two sincere natures. They will feel little regret, they will speedily find consolation; and still they are distressed, nature speaks—"nature suffers," as they say; they are conscious of the affection of blood (*tendresse du sang*); and when Frederick at last informs his sister of that long-expected death, he does it in these words (June 1, 1740):

"My Dearest Sister: God disposed of our dear father yesterday, at three o'clock. He died with angelic firmness, and without much suffering. I cannot make up for the loss that you have sustained except by the perfect and sincere affection with which," etc.

Prior to the demise of their father, there are some jesting allusions to his mad whims and to what is known of them elsewhere. The Margravine is ill (as she habitually was as a result of the sufferings which had already destroyed her health, and which shortened her life); she needs a skilful physician. Frederick tells her of one in Berlin, Herr von Superville, and bids her write to the king, to obtain leave to consult him. When she has obtained it, he suggests to her a sure means of keeping him in attendance on her as long as she wishes, and even of taking a journey if he prescribes it; that means is for the Margravine to send the

king a few tall men for his pet regiment; by virtue of this "six-foot compliment" paid to the king, all will go well; "two or three tall men, dispatched at an opportune moment, will be unanswerable arguments."

After Frederick became king (1740), the tender and affectionate tone of the correspondence did not change at once. In the first year of his reign Frederick goes to visit his sister at the Hermitage, near Baireuth, and she returns the visit, at Berlin; affection, and an intense, passionate affection, does not cease to breathe in all that they write to each other. And herein the letters, and the facts, do not coincide with the last part of the Margravine's *Mémoires*. She would have us believe in a sudden cooling-off on the part of Frederick when he became king, and she complains of it as of inconstancy for which there was no cause. But it was she who was first blameworthy in what ensued, and this is how her conduct is explained. When the Margravine married, she desired to have with her the Fraüleins von Marwitz, nieces of Frau von Sonsfeld, her governess. Later, noticing that her husband seemed to distinguish one of them by his attentions, she became jealous and determined to find a husband for her. Now, she had obtained from the late king the favour of having this young woman attend her, only upon the express condition, and upon her word of honour, that she would not marry her outside of Prussia. Thinking that she was relieved from her promise by the death of the king her father, she disregarded

that condition and united Fraülein von Marwitz to an officer of the imperial regiment which the Margrave commanded. Frederick, to whom his sister had not confided her special reasons, and who was a no less jealous guardian than his father of the interests of the Prussian fatherland, found cause for displeasure in this foreign marriage, as well as in other indications which the Court of Baireuth seemed to be giving of its leaning toward Austria, and he manifested his displeasure to his sister. The Margravine, having finished the writing of her *Mémoires* while this quarrel was at its height (1744), gave rein to the prejudice which then swayed her, and, while recalling the past, interjected into her reminiscences something of her present irritation; they take this colour or that at the whim of her moods.

The correspondence enables us to set all this right to-day, with absolute certainty. In it we find the princess coming speedily to her senses and making reparation to her brother for the vexation that she has caused him, and for the injustice toward him of which she has been guilty.

From that moment all trace of the first discord between them disappeared; their affection blazed up again from its ashes, brighter and more intense than ever; its bonds were renewed, and were thereafter indissoluble; brother and sister never again ceased to be "one heart in two bodies."

The nine years preceding the Seven Years' War are filled and enlivened by this correspondence, which is

altogether pleasant reading and reflects honour on both. It was the brilliant period, and the most literary, of Frederick's reign; it was then that he endeavoured to gather about him the élite of the distinguished men of his time, and that he seemed for an instant to be on the point of succeeding.[1]

Among the men of letters who died at Berlin, there was one who was held in little esteem, and whose works have long since been thrown aside. Do not imagine that Frederick thought them good, but he draws a living and speaking portrait of the author, which tells the whole story in a few words:

"We have lost poor La Mettrie [November 21, 1751]. He died for the sake of a jest, by eating a whole pheasant pie; he took it into his head to be bled, in order to prove to the German physicians that bleeding could safely be resorted to in indigestion; it succeeded ill with him. He is regretted by all who knew him. He was a jovial, good fellow, a good doctor, and a very wretched author; *but by not reading his books, it was possible to like him very well.*"

To know, of some people, only their books, and, for greater security, to shun their persons; of others, to know only the persons while carefully avoiding their books;—this is a good receipt to remember, and may still be found of useful application.

These various items of news which Frederick writes to his sister are only the accidents of their correspondence; its substance is made up of their sentiments, their thoughts, and of moral or metaphysical questions which the sister propounds to the brother, and

[1] See Vol. I, pp. 217, 218.

which he strives to solve; for instance: "What is the difference between constancy in esteem and constancy in love?" She has plenty of leisure at Baireuth, and she lacks only subjects and intimates, to found there a Hôtel de Brancas or de Rambouillet on a small scale. She longs for conversation; there is emptiness and silence all about her. In default of conversation near at hand, she seeks it at a distance, and luckily she finds in her brother a correspondent who has time for everything. I am not sure whether it is true, as he says, that being king makes him feel like a slave, and that it is a trade which he follows solely from necessity and because his birth condemns him to it.

"Most people are ambitious to rise; for my part, I would like to descend if, as a reward of that sacrifice, which would not be a sacrifice for me because it would cost me nothing, I could obtain my liberty."

This liberty, if he had obtained it, might well have embarrassed him, considering his ambition and his eager activity. In a journey to Italy, undertaken by the Margravine for her health, she plucks at Naples a twig of Virgil's laurel and sends it to him as a gift from the shade of the poet to the hero who is Alexander's rival. Frederick does not enter into his sister's outbursts of enthusiasm, and although he has to his credit the five victories of his two Silesian wars, he seems really confused by the compliment.

"I confess that I had a shock when I received a laurel wreath from your hands. If anything could overturn this weak brain of mine the

complimentary words which you add would do it. But, my dear sister, when I examine myself, I find only a poor mortal composed of a mixture of good and evil, who is often exceedingly ill-content with himself and would be very glad to have more good qualities than he has; who is fitted to live the life of a private individual, but compelled to live in public; a philosopher by inclination, and a politician by duty; who is, in a word, obliged to be everything that he is not, and who has no other merit than religious devotion to his duties."

While feigning to belittle himself thus, by curtly repelling all grandeur, and spurning everything that savours of the demigod, Frederick looked carefully to it that he resembled a very noble kingly ideal. But in this whole correspondence between the brother and sister he reveals himself fully on one side of his nature,—the literary, artistic, virtuoso, *bel-esprit* side. There is almost nothing of the king; he is a private person talking of those things which are the delight of his life. And all this familiarity of an "old brother," as he calls himself, is heightened by his unfailing admiration for his sister, whom he evidently considers superior to himself in talent, in beauty of intellect, and in *genius*. He lavishes attentions and little presents upon her; he shares her suffering, he trembles for her life; he shows her to us with "an indefinable grace, an air of dignity tempered by affability," which the Margravine's *Mémoires* do not reveal; in a word, by the reverential affection which she inspires in him, he arouses our interest in that fragile, rare creature, in "that so feeble body and delicate constitution, conjoined with such a noble soul."

The Seven Years' War, interrupting the flow of Frederick's prosperity and his fully occupied leisure, puts his sister's spirit to the test—that noble and sensitive spirit—and enables us to appreciate her in her most eminent qualities, in her truly historic attitude.

Frederick saw the war approaching from a long distance, although it surprised him a little at the last. His sister prophesied it and feared it in 1755, noting the collisions between England and France on the subject of the boundaries of Canada, and the maritime hostilities which followed.

"You tell me of your fear of war," he wrote to her (September 21, 1755), "but, my dear sister, it 's a long way from the Ohio River to the Spree, and from the fort of Beau-Séjour to Berlin. I will wager that the Austrians will not move at once in Flanders. War travels like a great lady: She began in America, now she has reached the ocean and the English Channel; she has n't landed yet, and if she does land next spring, she may perhaps, for greater comfort, travel in a litter, so that we shall see her coming a long way off. And after all, one is exposed to so many risks in the regular course of life, that war adds to them only a trifle."

Ere long the two rival powers, realising that an open conflict was inevitable, laboured to involve the different continental powers in their quarrel: France formed an alliance with Austria, England joined hands with Prussia. Having felt the pulse of Austria and satisfied himself of her unfriendly designs, Frederick determined to be beforehand with her and to take the field without a preliminary declaration of war. That was his sister's advice.

The fateful year 1757 began; it was the year most fruitful in sudden changes of all sorts, when Frederick seemed to experience all possible contradictory freaks of fortune; in the following years he had to contend against repetitions simply, severe enough still, but less so than at first. The Margravine takes the most absorbing interest in his fate; she admires him as her hero, as the greatest of reigning princes, "and one of those phenomenal mortals who appear at most only once in a century." After his early successes, from which he does not perhaps reap all the advantage that he might have done, she beholds him on the point of being crushed between the three hostile powers; she burns to intervene in his behalf. Events urge him to consent. After his defeat at Kolin (June 18th), he seems disposed to allow her to move in his interest—this sister endowed with virile courage, who would be incapable of advising him to do anything unworthy. She offers to make an attempt at opening negotiations with France.

On July 7, 1757, Frederick writes to her these significant words which aptly define the delicate rôle that she had undertaken in that grave emergency.

"Since, my dear sister, you insist upon undertaking the great work of peace, I beg you to be good enough to send this M. de Mirabeau to France. I will gladly provide for his expenses; he may offer the favourite [Madame de Pompadour] as much as five hundred thousand crowns for peace, and he may increase his offer much beyond that sum if he can at the same time bind her to secure some advantages for us. You realise how discreetly this matter must be handled, and how little

I must appear in it; the least suspicion of anything of the sort in England might ruin everything. I think that your emissary would do well to apply also to his kinsman [Bernis] who has lately become minister, and whose influence is increasing day by day. However, I leave it all to you. To whom could I more fitly entrust the interests of a country whose welfare I seek, than to a sister whom I adore, and *who, although far more accomplished than I, is another myself?*"

It was shortly after this that the Margravine conceived the idea of making use of Voltaire for another essay of the same sort and with the same object, but which seems to be distinct from the preceding one.

She had never ceased to be on good terms with Voltaire, and had corresponded with him both before and after his fall from grace at Berlin. In her correspondence with him she called herself "Sister Wilhelmina," or "Sister Guillemette," of the same abbey as "Brother Voltaire."

I do not vouch for the perfect taste of all the pleasantry that we find in these early letters of the Margravine; she is eminently a person of the age in which she lived and, to some extent, of her native land. She suspects as much herself, and would like Voltaire to give to her little society a last touch, a final polish of civilisation, by making "a pilgrimage to Notre-Dame de Baireuth."

He always promises and never comes. "You impose upon me the fate of Tantalus; pray out-German the Germans in your resolutions and give me the pleasure of seeing you again." She implores the poet-philosopher "to guide her in the way of truth," and

meanwhile she makes objections, but always in a more advanced, more radical direction. But we have little concern with the Margravine's philosophy, which is little more than her brother's in a different form; we are especially concerned with the ardent and loyal sentiments which she revealed and which characterise her more truly.

As we have seen in an earlier volume [1] she opened negotiations with Voltaire soon after the battle of Kolin. Voltaire at once set to work with an activity of which certain letters in his previously published *Correspondance* gave us a hint, and which other letters recently [1856] published have made abundantly clear. Being then in Switzerland, at Les Délices, and on intimate terms with the Tronchins of Geneva, it occurred to him to employ one of the members of that family, a banker at Lyon, and to use him as a medium of communication with the archbishop of that city, Cardinal de Tencin, formerly of the royal council, but momentarily out of office, who, nevertheless, still had friends at Versailles and gleams of hope of returning thither.

In a note dictated to Tronchin the cardinal welcomed the overture, while gently putting aside the ambitious prospect of which a glimpse was offered him; he said, among other things: "I will willingly take charge of Madame la Margrave's letter, and I think that she will do well to embody in the letter which she writes me

[1] Vol. I, p. 217.

the judicious reflections set forth by M. de Voltaire in his letter concerning the aggrandisement of the House of Austria."

A letter in the sense suggested was written by the Margravine and addressed, not to the King of France, but to the cardinal; the letter to the king was not to come until after they had felt the ground at Versailles. Meanwhile overtures were also made to the Maréchal de Richelieu, then commanding the French army in Saxony; and while no definite result was obtained with respect to the main object, they succeeded, by indirect means, in abating his individual zeal.

Then followed weeks of terrible apprehension for the Margravine. Berlin was for two days in the power of the Austrian army, which held the inhabitants to ransom. Frederick, in the curious verses which he wrote at all hazards in the brief breathing-spaces between battles, and which afterwards obtained almost as much currency as his bulletins, had manifested a design more after the antique than the modern fashion: it was, after attempting one last great *coup*, to refuse to survive his ruin—to kill himself. He had said so in the *Épître* to d'Argens. He said so again to Voltaire, in the best verses that he ever wrote:

> " Pour moi, menacé du naufrage,
> Je dois, en affrontant l'orage,
> Penser, vivre, et mourir en roi."[1]

[1] See Vol. I, p. 219.

He repeated it to his sister at the close of the *Épître* that he addressed to her in August, 1757:

> "Ainsi, mon seul asile, et mon unique port
> Se trouve, chère sœur, dans les bras de la mort."[1]

His sister replied at once (September 15th):

"Your letter and the one you wrote to Voltaire, my dear brother, have almost killed me. Great God! what a ghastly determination! Ah! my dear brother, you say that you love me, and you plunge a dagger into my heart. Your *Épître,* which I have just received, has made my tears flow in rivers. I am ashamed now that I was so weak. My misery would be so great that I should find in it a more dignified resource. *Your fate will be decisive of mine; I will not survive your misfortunes nor those of my family. You may depend upon it that this is my steadfast resolution.* But, after this confession, I beg you to consider the pitiable state of your enemy [Maria-Theresa] when you were before Prague. There has been a sudden change of fortune on both sides; this change may be repeated when you least expect it. Cæsar was once the slave of pirates and became the lord of the earth. A great genius like yours finds resources even when all is lost. . . ."

Voltaire wrote to Frederick in the same strain and redeemed all his past offences by the good sense and frankness of his remonstrances. To kill one's self in order to avoid yielding would be, in Frederick's position, to commit a deed inspired by pride much more than by courage, especially the courage of a patriotic citizen.

As for the Margravine, after remonstrating to Frederick, she did not hesitate, but held herself ready to share and to imitate his fate.

[1] "And so, dear sister, my sole refuge and my only safe harbour are to be found in the arms of death."

"I am in a frightful condition," she wrote to Voltaire (August 19th), "and I shall not survive the ruin of my house and my family; that is the only consolation I have left." And on October 16th: "Our situation is still unchanged; *a tomb is our outlook.* Although all seems lost, there are some things which no one can take from us: they are steadfastness and the emotions of the heart."

Meanwhile Frederick freely discussed with her his tragic resolution, and their common destiny; he felt the force of the arguments that were put before him and admitted them in part.

"If I followed my own inclination solely, *I should have despatched myself* instantly after the unlucky battle that I lost; but I felt that that would be rank weakness, and that it was my duty to repair the evil that had befallen. My attachment to the State reawoke; I said to myself: 'It is not in good, but in evil fortune, that one rarely finds defenders.'"

But this attachment to the State, he held, could not bind him beyond certain limits, and there were humiliations which he did not consider himself bound to undergo.

The long distances and the difficulties of communication caused breaks in their correspondence and intervals of silence which led the Margravine to fear that everything was consummated; witness this feverish, delirious letter, which gives voice to the paroxysm of her affection and her anxiety:

"Death and ten thousand torments could offer nothing equal to my frightful state of mind. There are rumours about that make me shudder; they say that you are dangerously wounded—others say, sick. In vain have I put forth every effort to obtain news of you; I can learn nothing. O my dear brother! whatever may happen to you, I shall not survive you. If I am left in this cruel uncertainty, I shall sink un-

der it, and I shall be happy. I was on the point of sending you a courier, but I dared not. In God's name, send me a line. I do not know what I have written; my heart is torn asunder, and I feel as if my mind were wandering with anxiety and terror. O my dearest, adorable brother, have pity on me! Heaven grant that I may be mistaken and that you will scold me! but the slightest thing that concerns you goes to my heart and alarms my love too keenly. May I die a thousand deaths, if only you may live and be happy! I can say no more,—my grief is choking me."—(October 15, 1757.)

In this extremity, while Frederick argued about his situation like a man who had read and pondered the twelfth chapter of the "Decline and Fall of the Roman People," and while he assumed to usurp the most ambitious of all privileges for a mortal,—that of "ending the play" in which he was an actor "at whatever point he chose,"—the aspect of affairs suddenly changed, and a slight puff of fortune's breath rendered of no account all his exalted reminiscences of Cato. Every one knows the unforeseen incidents of the battle of Rossbach: a prolonged false march, before a strongly posted enemy, who had had time to draw up in order of battle, brought about an easy and speedy defeat, the moral effect of which, however, was enormous. "It was a *bataille en douceur,*" said Frederick, announcing his victory to the Margravine (November 5th). "Thank God! I had less than a hundred men killed." And he was justified in adding: "Now I shall go down into the tomb in peace, since the reputation and honour of my nation are saved. We may be unfortunate, but we shall not be dishonoured."

In her great joy, the Margravine wrote Voltaire a detailed bulletin; she added an assurance that their sincere desire for peace was unchanged. She drew heavily on her strength in writing these long letters; her health was wrecked, a dry cough racked her body, and she was about to enter upon the last days of her mortal suffering.

Letters between the Margravine and her brother in the early months of 1758 are rare, whether because a goodly number have been lost or suppressed, or because the Margravine's ill health made them less frequent. Frederick tries to save his sister's territory from the horrors of war, and to lead the enemy in another direction by frequent diversions. In every letter, and in the most heartfelt tone, he expresses his sympathy with her suffering and all that she is in his life.

"What! ill and weak as you are, you dwell upon my embarrassments! Upon my word, that is too much. Think rather—think and be fully convinced—that without you there is no more happiness in life for me, that my life hangs upon yours, and that it rests with you to cut short or prolong my career. If you love me, give me some hope of your recovery. No,—life would be intolerable to me without you. This is not mere empty talk, it is true. My heart and my soul are at Baireuth, with you, and my frail body vegetates here, on the highroads and in camp."

And she, when she had reached the final period of her illness and the last stage of consumption, wrote to him (August 10, 1758):

"You wish, my dear brother, to know about my condition. I have been in bed six months, like a poor Lazarus. For the last week

I have been placed on a wheeled chair to give me a little change of position. I have a dry cough which is very violent, and which they cannot control; my legs, as well as my hands and face, are swollen as big as a bushel measure. . . . I am resigned to my fate; I shall live and die content, provided that you are happy."

She died on the 14th of October in that year (1758), at the age of forty-nine,—the same day that her brother was beaten at Hochkirch by the Austrians. When he learned of that too-long-expected death, he was plunged in gloom and mourning. "I never saw such profound affliction," says his reader, Herr von Catt, in his unpublished memoirs; "shutters closed, his room barely lighted by a faint gleam of daylight; reading serious works: Bossuet's *Oraisons Funèbres,* Fléchier, Mascaron, and a volume of Young, for which he asked me." He consecrated to her memory a noble passage in his "History of the Seven Years' War." Of various passages in his poetry I say nothing; he fully realised that not in that way would he give her immortality.

I have no purpose to belittle the eminent qualities of the Margravine, after striving so carefully to assemble them and lay them before the reader's eyes. She was evidently a person of the greatest distinction, intellectual, unaffected, piquant, capable of satire, even more capable of affection, tenderly devoted to her brother, and at need measuring up to him in firmness of character and stoic determination. In one of the most critical emergencies which persons of their rank have ever had to face, she conducted herself with exceeding

vigour and a self-sacrificing spirit; if Frederick had come to a violent end at that time, she would unquestionably have died with him; she had the soul of a Portia or a Roland. But why is it that her whole life, and that countenance, so animated and so brave, always lack a certain charm, a certain ideal beauty, which neither poet nor painter can bestow upon them without being unfaithful to the truth? In less distant times there was another sister of a king, who would fain have shared her brother's fate and have died with him; this other king was far from being a great man, or even superior to other men; he was simply an honourable man, and his sister was a pure, sweet, simple, pious woman, especially rich in treasures of the heart. To die with her brother, but not to kill herself with him,—that is what that angelic creature had meditated upon in her patient and tranquil heroism, at the foot of the crucifix. Let us give them their names: Louis XVI.'s sister, Madame Élisabeth, who had so many opportunities to escape and to leave France, chose to remain where danger was, and resigned herself to suffer everything and to die. The sacrifice was consummated; and thanks to the victim's simplicity of heart, thanks to the sublimity of the springs of faith whence she drew her inspiration, there descended upon her, in that supreme immolation of self, a divine ray which never leaves her, and which illumines that spotless brow and that celestial glance with the serene purity of one of Raphael's faces.

This said, let us be content to recognise in the Margravine one of the original women of the eighteenth century,—a lively wit, a rare pride, a character, and a profile which have their well-defined place, not only in anecdote, but also in the history of her time; and which will always be distinguishable in the background of the picture, beside the king, her brother. She has her name and her title in the book of the future; her *Correspondance* cloaks and redeems her *Mémoires;* and whenever she is mentioned, people will say first of all: "She was a king's sister."

Beaumarchais.

1732–1799.

Beaumarchais.

THE eighteenth century is no more complete without Beaumarchais than without Diderot, Voltaire, or Mirabeau; he is one of its most original, most characteristic, most revolutionary personages. When he is revolutionary, it is from impulse, from precipitancy, and with no fixed purpose to go so far as one might think. In this regard he strongly resembles Voltaire, with whom he shares the honour of being perhaps the wittiest man of his time. But Voltaire had more taste than Beaumarchais; Beaumarchais followed his wit wherever it chose to go, abandoned himself to it, and never mastered it. In speaking of him, we must take care not to be systematic, for he himself was nothing of the kind; he was simply a man of great natural parts, tossed about and sometimes submerged in the waves of his epoch, and swimming in many currents.

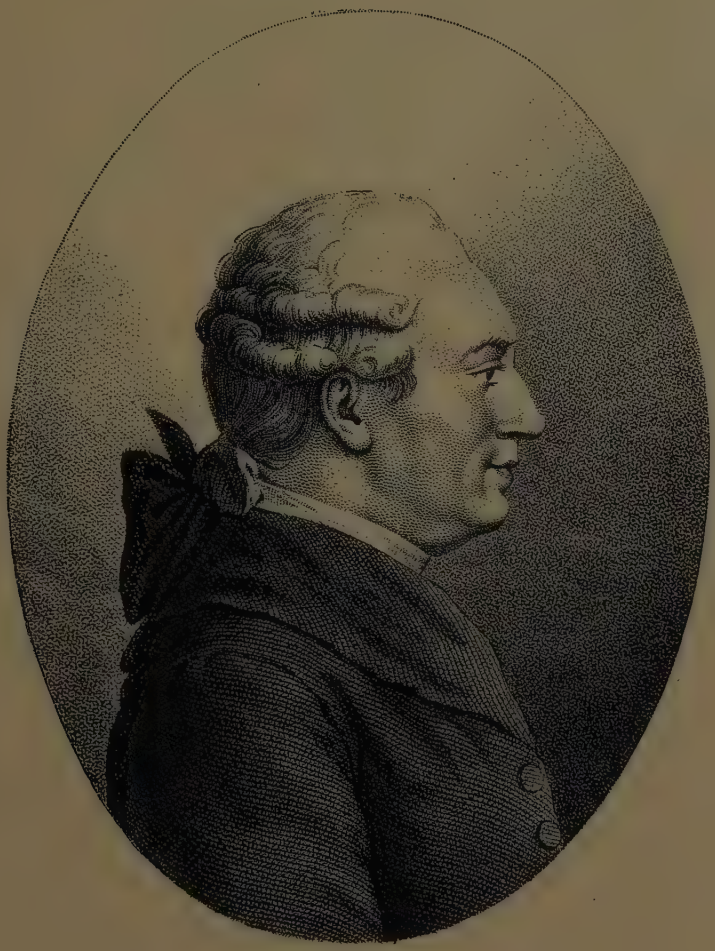
Pierre-Augustin-Caron, who later assumed the name of Beaumarchais, was born in Paris, January 24, 1732, in the parish of Saint-Jacques-la-Boucherie. His family, originally of Normandie, had afterwards settled in Brie; it was of the Protestant faith. Beaumarchais'

father, a watchmaker by trade, who brought up his son in the same handicraft, seems to have been a worthy, good-hearted man, who had retained, of his Protestant habits, a goodly store of religious conviction and affection. When, at a later period, during his famous lawsuits, he was sneered at because of his middle-class extraction, Beaumarchais spoke of this father of his in a charming way, which reminds one of Horace:

"You begin this masterpiece of yours," he said to Madame Goëzman (his adversary), "by reproaching me with my ancestors' trade. Alas! madame, it is too true that the last of them all combined with several branches of trade quite a reputation in the art of watchmaking. Being obliged to plead guilty to this charge, I confess with sorrow that nothing can acquit me of the just accusation which you make against me—of being the son of my father. But I pause,—for I feel him behind me, looking at what I am writing, and laughing as he embraces me. Oh! you who throw my father at my head, you have no conception of his noble heart. In truth, leaving the watchmaking out of the question, I know no other father for whom I would care to exchange him."

This sensitive, honourable, virtuous father wrote one day to his son, who was then in Spain, having gone thither to avenge one of his sisters (1764), a letter which has been published, and which would be worthy of Diderot's father, or of Diderot himself speaking through the mouth of a father in one of his dramas:

"You urge me modestly to love you a little. That is not possible, my dear boy: a son like you is not of the sort to be loved only a little by a father who thinks and feels as I do. The tears of affection which fall from my eyes on this paper are abundant proof of it. The



BEAUMARCHAIS.

After the painting by St. Aubin.

excellent qualities of your heart, the strength and nobility of your mind, fill me with the most devoted love. Oh! my son, my dear son, the honour of my grey hairs, how have I deserved from my God the favours with which He overwhelms me in my dear son? To my mind, a son like you is the greatest favour that He can bestow upon an honourable, sensitive father. My great suffering has ceased since yesterday, as I am able to write to you. I was five days and four nights without eating or sleeping, and groaning constantly. In the intervals when my suffering abated a little, I read *Grandison,* and in how many places I found a striking resemblance between Grandison and my son! Father of your sisters, and friend and benefactor of your father! If England, I said to myself, has its Grandisons, France has its Beaumarchais."

To understand the enthusiasm and the tone of this letter, it should be said that Beaumarchais, about this time, had signalised himself by an energetic proof of devotion to his family. We see in it, however, the ordinary style of the family in the rare moments when they are not joking. One of Beaumarchais' sisters also compared him to Grandison. Evidently he was the hero and the hope of the family; the only son among five sisters, only three of whom had remained in France, and all of whom adored and admired him, whether for his wit, or for the qualities of his heart. Endowed with physical attractions, and with an inventive mind, overflowing with audacity and gaiety, there was in his acts and in his whole personality something which prepossessed people in his favour; and he himself was prepossessed first of all. When he made his début in letters, rather late in life, all those who spoke of him commented at the outset upon this air of self-assurance and conceit. The self-assurance, which was

simply unbounded confidence in his wit and in his talents, he always retained; but the conceit was on the surface only, for all those who saw him at close quarters, people of all sorts, have acknowledged that he was an excellent fellow.

I leave it for his biographer to describe his first essays in verse, in rhymed prose. I have seen a letter that he wrote from Spain, to one of his sisters, when he was thirteen years old, in which one may detect, through the schoolboy, something of Cherubino and of the libertine, a ready pen, and abundant gaiety. This gaiety is the essential thing in Beaumarchais, and it was destined never to betray him when he gave himself up to it, whereas his sensibility sometimes impelled him toward pathos.

He continued for quite a long while in watchmaking, and his vanity did not suffer for it. He exhibited his creative talent by an escapement which he invented, and which one Lepante contested his right to. The cause was carried to the Académie des Sciences, and Beaumarchais won it. This first title of honour never ceased to be dear to him, and he kept the parchment in a casket beside the manuscript of *Figaro*. However, after spending thus a large part of his youth between four show-windows, as he says, he tired of it and took his flight. It is at this point that it would be interesting to follow in detail what he called "the philosophical romance of his life." We will simply call attention to a few heads of chapters. He was

fond of music, he sang, and wrote songs; he could play the guitar, and above all the harp, then a great novelty, and he carried into these amusements that spirit of invention which he displayed in everything. What a delightful musician, what a fascinating and insinuating Lindor, Beaumarchais must have been at twenty-four years!

He became acquainted with the wife of a man who held a subordinate office at Court; she loved him, and, her husband having died, he secured the office by marrying, on November 27, 1756, the widow, whose name was Marie-Madeleine Aubertin. He was unfortunate enough to lose her shortly after, and was left a widower on September 29, 1757. However, he had this little office at Court, which gave him a foothold in the houses of the greatest courtiers. As a musician, as an agreeable young man, of no consequence, he was introduced, about 1760, into the circle of Mesdames Royales, the daughters of Louis XV.

"I passed four years," he said, "earning their goodwill by the most assiduous and most unselfish attention to various details of their amusements."

The great financier, Paris-Duverney, who had become in his old age superintendent of the École Militaire, of which he had first suggested the idea to Madame de Pompadour, and the organisation of which he had directed, ardently desired that the royal family should honour with a visit that patriotic establishment

to which he was devoting his last thoughts. He had not as yet succeeded in obtaining this supreme testimony of regard when Beaumarchais undertook to arouse in Mesdames the desire to make the visit, and to communicate it through them to the dauphin, and if possible to the king himself. He succeeded. Duverney, in his gratitude, loudly declared that he would make the young man's fortune.

He kept his word. After various promising offers which did not turn out as he wished, "it occurred to him to fulfil his promise at a single stroke," says Beaumarchais, "by lending me five hundred thousand francs to purchase an office, which I was to repay at my leisure from the proceeds of the interests which he promised me in various great undertakings." This office, which was, I believe, in the Department of Forests and Public Lands, although purchased by Beaumarchais, he was unable to retain; he found an insurmountable obstable in the united arrogant pretensions of the society which he sought to enter, and which deemed him unworthy by reason of his watchmaking antecedents. He indulged in divers philosophical reflections upon human folly, did not lose his temper, and turned in another direction. Shortly after, we find him in possession of another office at Court, his titles being equerry, counsellor-secretary to the king, and lieutenant-general of the chase in the bailiwick of the Louvre, of which the Duc de la Vallière was captain. In this capacity of lieutenant-general of

the chase, he had cognisance of certain offences, and was invested with a judicial office the functions of which he performed without too much hilarity.

In 1764 (he was then thirty-two years old), one of the most dramatic episodes of his life takes place, which he himself has described in one of his memorials: I refer to the episode of Clavico, upon which dramas have been written; but the only real drama is in Beaumarchais. To confine ourselves to a simple summary: Beaumarchais was informed that, of his two sisters who had long been settled in Spain, the younger, who was not married, had been twice on the point of marrying a man of talent, one of the higher government clerks in Madrid, named Clavico, who had twice broken his word. This young sister, dying of her love and of the insult, appeals for a defender and an avenger. Beaumarchais sets out, supplied with letters from Paris-Duverney (including many letters of exchange), and with all sorts of recommendations to the ambassador. He arrives at Madrid, calls upon Clavico without giving his name, invents a pretext, tests him in conversation, talks to him about literature, flatters him, attacks him through his self-esteem, and then suddenly turns about, broaches the delicate subject, holds the sword over his head for some time, the better to thrust with it;—and his narrative of all this dialogue, with the pantomime of the victim, is a masterpiece of strategy and of shrewd management, which constantly borders on the tragic

and the comic at the same time. But the end of the adventure is not at all in keeping with the beginning, and Beaumarchais is very near becoming the dupe of the knave whom he has unmasked and pressed so close.

This family affair concluded, and Beaumarchais having escaped the danger in which it had involved him, he remained another whole year in Spain, trying to engage in business and to carry through certain important enterprises in the name of a French company. So far as we can discover, it was a matter of contracting to supply various American provinces with negro slaves for ten years. Although he did not succeed, Beaumarchais impressed all those persons with whom he came in contact in Spain with a favourable idea of his capacity and his talents.

Thus far, that is to say, at the time of his return from Spain (1765), he had written nothing for the public; he was about to make his bow, and his early attempts were not happy. His drama *Eugénie,* given at the Comédie-Française in February, 1767, is in the vein of the serious, decent, domestic drama, which Diderot tried to bring into fashion. In *Eugénie,* and in *Les Deux Amis,* which followed (January, 1770), Beaumarchais is as yet simply a sentimental, bourgeois dramatist, tearful and solemn, of the type of La Chaussée and of Diderot. Even the latter did not avow him as a pupil and a son, and Collé, who knew what humour was, was very far from detecting

in him a confrère and a master. "M. de Beaumarchais," says Collé, "has proved beyond any question, by his drama, that he has neither genius, nor talent, nor wit." This sentence Collé apologises for in a note overflowing with admiration and repentance, written after the *Barbier de Séville*.

Let us leave once for all this Beaumarchais-Grandison, who is headed in the wrong direction, and let us come at once, through the various incidents of his life, to the real Beaumarchais, whose veritable comic strain was destined to manifest itself unexpectedly, and all the more naturally, even before he became the Beaumarchais of *Figaro*. He had always had this vein of gaiety, but it did not occur to him until late, and only under the spur of necessity, to introduce it into his works. His life as a private individual was at this time most agreeable and almost opulent. He had married a second time, April 11, 1768, a widow, Geneviève-Madeleine Wattebled, Madame Lévesque, but evil fortune decreed that he should lose her in November, 1770. Paris-Duverney, who had died in the meantime, had left for Beaumarchais a statement of account, in which he acknowledged that he owed him some fifteen thousand francs. It is at this point that the famous series of lawsuits begins. Paris-Duverney's heir, the Comte de La Blache, chose to deny the debt of fifteen thousand francs, and to argue that the account was a forgery. Hence a lawsuit, won in the court of first instance by Beaumarchais.

He, hunting more than one hare at once, and always confident and imprudent, had, while this lawsuit was pending in the Parliament, a violent altercation with the Duc de Chaulnes about a mistress, one Mademoiselle Mesnard. The result was that, after each of them had been in custody several days in his own house, the duke was confined in a citadel and Beaumarchais imprisoned at For-l'Évêque. His adversary, the Comte de La Blache, took advantage of the opportunity to push the affair of the fifteen thousand francs before the Parliament; he represented Beaumarchais as an abandoned person, a scoundrel who had abused the confidence of everybody with whom he came in contact. Forged letters from him or against him were circulated; it was insinuated that he had rid himself by poison of his two wives, the two widows whom he had married in succession. In brief, the Comte de La Blache resorted to all sorts of expedients, won his suit, caused the prisoner's furniture to be taken on execution, and ruined him with the costs; so that Beaumarchais found himself, within two months, "hurled down from the most agreeable condition that a private individual could enjoy, into misfortune and destitution. I was an object of shame and compassion to myself," he said.

It was at this time, in this desperate plight, that he exhibited rare energy and serenity. A curious and apparently most trivial incident gave him an opening, which he seized, to recover his advantage, and to re-

trieve, by adroitness and talent, all that he had lost. This was the decisive moment in Beaumarchais' destiny (June, 1773). He was then a man of forty years, everything about whom, even his wit, had seemed questionable up to that time. He was driven to the wall, beaten, crushed; it was for him to display, on the instant, energy, wit, and genius; and he did it.

The incident which served him as a battle-field when everything seemed lost was this: being a prisoner at For-l'Évêque, and having occasion, according to custom, to solicit his judges, he had obtained permission to go out for three or four days, accompanied by an officer. In that brief time, he made several useless attempts to obtain access to Counsellor Goëzman, to whom his cause was referred, and who was prejudiced and unfavourable to him. Then it was, in his distress and despair, that he was told that there was one infallible way of penetrating to this magistrate's study, and that was to make a present to his wife. A hundred *louis d'or,* a lovely repeating-watch set with diamonds, and, in addition, fifteen louis *in silver,* supposed to be intended for a secretary,—all these things were presented one after another to the wife, in order to obtain an audience of her husband, and with a promise on her part that they should all be returned if the suit were lost. It was lost, and the lady, honourably enough, returned the one hundred louis and the watch; but by a singular freak, she persisted in

keeping the fifteen wretched louis which were given in addition; hence a great outcry, complaints, and much loud talk from Counsellor Goëzman, who knew or did not know all these details, and who had the audacity to accuse Beaumarchais, on the ground that he had endeavoured to bribe his judge.

It was, I say, from this depth of oppression and prostration that Beaumarchais rose again and took the field, pen in hand, addressing himself this time, in four consecutive memorials, to public opinion, and to the public itself, whom he had the knack of impressing and exciting. To understand how he was able thus to reverse public opinion, we must not forget that this Parliament with which he had to deal was that which Chancellor Maupeou had substituted for the former Parliament, which was exiled and finally abolished. The art of Beaumarchais consisted in imperceptibly confounding his cause with the insult inflicted upon the whole nation, and in making himself, by his exacerbated pleasantries, the universal avenger. All the scenes in which he introduces Madame Goëzman—a light-headed, rather pretty woman, whose head was turned by a compliment, who was totally confused by the truth, and who offered in her whole behaviour a mixture of knavery, impudence, and innocence—are absolutely perfect scenes of comedy. The poor creature! in her cross-examination he makes her say that black is white, he makes her angry and soothes her; when he has pressed her beyond endurance, she

threatens him with a slap; when he pays her a compliment, and tells her that she seems only eighteen years old instead of thirty, she smiles in spite of herself, ceases to think him so impertinent, and goes so far as to ask his hand to escort her to her carriage. It is all delicious in its gaiety, its shrewdness, and its irony. And so it is with all those whom he introduces on his stage: we recognise them, and we never forget them.

Public opinion at once declared itself, and in a few months Beaumarchais had more than regained public esteem, he possessed popularity,—that universal favour, at that time sovereign and triumphant, which did not as yet realise its limits. In the new circumstances in which he found himself thenceforth, the sentence of the Parliament was of very little importance. The judgment, which was awaited by people of all classes with indescribable curiosity, was peculiar and double-edged: by decree of February 26, 1774, Madame Goëzman was sentenced to be summoned to the Chamber, "there to be rebuked on her knees"; and Beaumarchais to undergo the same penalty; furthermore, his memorials were sentenced to be burned by the hangman, as insulting, scandalous, and defamatory. To arrive at this superb decision, the Parliament remained in session from five in the morning until almost nine at night.

On the very evening of the sentence, Beaumarchais was to take supper in the most exalted society, at Monsieur de Monaco's, where he had promised to read

the *Barbier de Séville,* the performance of which was postponed, but which the dauphiness (Marie Antoinette) had openly taken under her patronage. The amiable dauphiness had hoisted the flag of Beaumarchais, so to speak, by a head-dress called the *Quesaco,* which was so named from one of the jests in the memorials. On that evening the Prince de Conti inscribed his name at Beaumarchais' house, and invited him to pass the next day with him. "I want you to come to-morrow," he said in his note; "we are of sufficiently good family to set the example to France of the way in which a great citizen like you should be treated."

The whole Court followed the prince's example and wrote their names at the condemned man's door. And so he who, at the beginning of his rejoinder, was still nothing more than "the brilliant scapegrace," as Voltaire called him, had suddenly become a "great citizen." Wherever Beaumarchais showed himself, he was surrounded and applauded with frenzy. The lieutenant of police, Monsieur de Sartine, advised him not to appear in public. "To be rebuked," he said, "is not the whole thing; you must be modest too." Shortly after, in order to preserve a position which was more brilliant than safe, and was hazardous in spite of everything, Beaumarchais went to England, on a secret mission from the king, relative to the Chevalier d'Éon, from whom it was desired to obtain some state papers. Meanwhile the Parliament Mau-

peou went to pieces; the *Barbier de Séville* was performed in Paris, and Beaumarchais, his sentence being ostentatiously remitted, seized every opportunity to make a sensation and his fortune, became commissary in ordinary to the revolted American colonies, and entered, with wind astern and all sails set, upon that prosperous voyage which did not end until after the *Mariage de Figaro.*

On the morrow of his rebuke by the Parliament and his triumph in public opinion, Beaumarchais seems to me to have entered into a condition of partial intoxication and excitement from which he never again emerged. Such letters of his as we have of that date (1774-1775) exhibit him to us as himself amazed at his destiny; turning about, and looking at himself sidewise, to see how strange and odd it all is; travelling about, to England and Germany,—doing seven hundred and eighty leagues in six weeks, and more than eighteen hundred in eight months, and boasting of it; careful not to allow himself to be forgotten during his absences, and to reappear on the carpet from time to time, with narratives of such perils and adventures as befell nobody else. All this kept Paris society agape, and prevented it from going to sleep over Beaumarchais until the first performance of the *Barbier de Séville.*

The *Barbier* was written and announced long before. It had been accepted at the Comédie-Française in 1772; it was to have been given as a carnival farce, at

Mardi-Gras, 1773, when the violent quarrel between Beaumarchais and the Duc de Chaulnes occurred, in which the latter tried to stab his opponent. The jocund *Barbier* withstood this reverse, and was announced for the next carnival. Once more, in February, 1774, it was surely to be performed: the day was appointed, the dauphiness was to be present at the first performance; the whole hall was sold for six evenings. Again it was prohibited at the last moment, because of the author's lawsuit then pending before the Parliament. Again the *Barbier* made the best of it; Beaumarchais, instead of one comedy, produced another: the *Barbier* not having been given as announced on Saturday, February 12, on the following day, Sunday,—in fact, that very night, at the opera ball,—the author put on sale his famous fourth memorial, of which he disposed of six thousand copies and more before the authorities had time to intervene and to stop it. Meanwhile, from delay to delay, from carnival to carnival, the *Barbier's* hour arrived; it was performed on February 23, 1775. But then there befell another disappointment: the public, on the faith of the gossip of society, had anticipated so much laughter and fooling that at first it did not find enough. The play was originally in five acts, and it seemed tedious. Must we say it? the first day it was voted a bore. In order that it should succeed, it was necessary that the author should reduce the acts to four,—that he should cut himself in four pieces, as was said;—or, more simply,

as he himself put it, that he should remove the fifth wheel from his carriage. Then it was that the *Barbier,* as we know it to-day, rose again and began to live its light-hearted and joyous life, never to die. When he subsequently printed it, Beaumarchais gave himself the pleasure of putting on the title-page: "*Le Barbier de Séville,* acted upon the stage of the Comédie-Française, where it failed."

Not in these days can a critic hope to discover anything new concerning the *Barbier de Séville.* In introducing Figaro for the first time, the author did not as yet undertake to make of him the soliloquising character, given to moral reflections, the satirical, political, and philosophical reasoner which he afterward became in his hands.

"Abandoning myself to my sportive disposition," he said, "I tried in the *Barbier de Séville* to restore to the stage the outspoken gaiety of the olden time, combining it with the light and airy tone of our present-day jesting; but as even that was a species of novelty, the play was hotly prosecuted. It seemed as if I had shaken the foundations of the State."

The novelty of the *Barbier* was very much as Beaumarchais defines it here. He was naturally overflowing with merriment; he ventured to be himself in the *Barbier;* and in the eighteenth century, that was a mark of originality. "Pray give us more plays of this sort, since you are the only one who dares to laugh in our faces," people said to him.

The *Barbier* was intended at first to be set to music. Beaumarchais intended to make it an opéra-comique; indeed, it is said that he presented it in that shape to the Théâtre des Italiens of his time. Luckily he changed his mind. He proposed to be master on the stage, and the composer also proposed to be; it was impossible to come to an understanding. Beaumarchais had false ideas concerning dramatic music: he thought that it could never be seriously employed on the stage "until people realised that there should be no singing there except as one way of speaking." He was mistaken therein, and it is a good thing that he was mistaken. He was obliged to rewrite his comedy as we have it now; and later, another genius [Rossini] took up the work from the musical standpoint, and produced his own comedy.

"He who says author says *one who dares,*" is a remark of Beaumarchais, and no one ever justified that definition better than he. By mingling with the old French wit the fashions of the moment,—a touch of Rabelais and of Voltaire; by covering it with a thin Spanish disguise, and casting upon it a ray or two of the sun of Andalusia, he succeeded in being the most entertaining and the most restless Parisian of his time, the Gil Blas of the epoch of the Encyclopédie, on the eve of the revolutionary epoch; he restored the vogue of all sorts of old-fashioned truths and old satires, by rejuvenating them. He remodelled a goodly number of proverbs which were well-nigh worn out. In the

matter of wit, he was a great *rejuvenator,* and that was the most agreeable benefaction he could confer upon that antiquated society, which dreaded nothing so much as ennui, and even preferred danger and imprudence.

In the matter of publicity and of theatrical management, he was a past-master; he perfected the art of advertising and editorial puffing; the art of reading of plays in society, which forces the hand of the authorities and compels them to allow public performances sooner or later; the art of paving the way for such performances by half-public rehearsals at which hired applause is allowable; the art of maintaining and stimulating attention, even in the midst of a tremendous success, by means of trivial, unforeseen obstacles or by ostentatious acts of beneficence, which opportunely break the monotony. But let us not anticipate the machinery of *Figaro,*—let us observe simply that the success of the *Barbier de Séville* was responsible for a great reform in the relations between dramatic authors and actors. Up to that time authors were at the mercy of the actors, who, after a certain number of performances, and when the receipts had fallen below a certain fixed figure (which it was always easy to bring about), considered that they had a right to confiscate the plays, and to appropriate the profits thereafter. After thirty-two performances of the *Barbier,* Beaumarchais, who did not consider that "the literary spirit was incompatible with the commercial spirit,"

thought best to call upon the actors for an accounting. They evaded the demand and tried to oppose the examination of their books. Beaumarchais persisted; he demanded, not a sum in cash, which they were very willing to offer him, but a full and clear account,—a legitimate demand which they politely refused; he demanded it less for himself, because he had no need of it, than for his confrères, the men of letters, who had always been oppressed and robbed. The affair lasted for years; Beaumarchais followed it through all the steps of litigation, from the gentlemen of the chamber even to the Constituent Assembly. In a word, he first succeeded in obtaining a definite decision as to what property in dramatic works really consists in, and in causing it to be recognised and respected. The society of dramatic authors, which has been instituted in our day, ought never to meet without saluting the bust of Beaumarchais.

The famous *Mariage de Figaro* had been written for a long while, but could not be produced in the light of day. It was the Prince de Conti who, after the *Barbier de Séville,* had, as it were, challenged the author to recur to his Figaro and exhibit him a second time under circumstances more fully developed. Beaumarchais accepted the challenge, and the *Mariage* was written, or sketched, about 1775 or 1776, that is to say, during the period which I look upon as that when Beaumarchais was in possession of all his wit and all his genius, and after which we find him de-

generating slightly and going astray once more. There were five or six unique years (1771–1776), when, under the spur of adversity and necessity, and in the first breath of public favour, he attained full expression, and during which he felt the birth within him of almost supernatural faculties which he never again recovered to that degree.

It required even more wit, it has been said, to have the *Mariage de Figaro* acted than to write it. Beaumarchais worked at it for years. He had against him the king, the magistrates, the lieutenant of police, the keeper of the seals,—all the powers of the State. With that assurance and that audacious air which were peculiar to him, he sought aid and support even from the courtiers, that is to say, from those of whom he had made the most fun.

FIGARO. . . . . I was born to be a courtier.

SUZANNE. They say that 't is so difficult a trade!

FIGARO. To receive, to take, to ask,—behold the secret in three words!

It was, then, to the courtiers that he applied, directly. No one could be more of a courtier than Monsieur de Vaudreuil ; but he was arrogant and assuming in his courtiership, and prided himself upon not being one. And what more striking proof of independence could he give than to patronise *Figaro?* French society was at this time in a curious frame of mind: its members vied with one another in making

sport of themselves and of their class, and in hastening its ruin. That seemed to be the noblest rôle of fashionable people. Beaumarchais saw plainly that, by means of the social circle of M. de Vaudreuil and Madame de Polignac, by means of the influence of the queen, and the Comte d'Artois, and by means of the curiosity of the women and of the courtiers, he could triumph over the resistance of Louis XVI; it was for him only a question of time.

We know his successive manœuvres, his marches and countermarches, so to speak, in this audacious undertaking, almost day by day. "The king does not choose to permit the performance of my play, therefore, it shall be performed." On June 12, 1783, he very nearly carried the day by surprise. By means of a tacit tolerance due to the patronage of the Comte d'Artois, and on the strength of a vague remark boldly interpreted, he had succeeded in having his play rehearsed on the stage of the Menus-Plaisirs, that is to say, upon the king's own stage. There had been a certain number of half-public rehearsals, and they were about to proceed and give the performance. The tickets were distributed, bearing an engraved figure of Figaro in his costume. The carriages arrived in great numbers, the Comte d'Artois had already started for Paris from Versailles, when the Duc de Villequier caused the actors to be informed that they must abstain from giving the play "on pain of incurring His Majesty's wrath."

At this order from the king, Beaumarchais, disappointed and frantic, insolently cried out before everybody: "Very good! he does not want us to play it here, messieurs, but I swear that rather than not be played at all, it shall be played if necessary in the very choir of Notre-Dame."

It was only a postponement. Monsieur de Vaudreuil, one of the author's patrons, obtained leave to have the play given at his house at Gennevilliers on September 26, 1783, by the actors from the Comédie-Française, before an audience of three hundred. The queen, not being well, could not be present; but the Comte d'Artois and the Duchesse de Polignac were there. All the flower of the old régime came to applaud the play that ridiculed and undermined it. Beaumarchais, who was present, was in the seventh heaven. "He ran about in all directions," says an eye-witness, "like a man beside himself; and when some one complained of the heat, he did not wait to have the windows opened, but broke all the panes with his cane, which led some one to say, after the play, that he had broken the windows twice."

Emboldened by all this approbation and, we might almost say, this complicity, and relying upon a vague word from Monsieur de Breteuil, upon which he had seized as an authorisation to proceed, Beaumarchais succeeded so well that he persuaded the actors to give his play in the latter part of February, 1784; the rehearsal had already taken place, and the lieutenant of

police, Monsieur Le Noir, was obliged to write to the author and the actors to remind them of the king's final prohibition. Beaumarchais, although rebuffed again, did not consider himself beaten.

At last, on April 27, 1784, the explosion took place, and, the prohibition being removed, the play could be given at Paris. Nothing was lacking in the solemnity and the *éclat* of that first performance.

"More than one duchess," says Grimm, "deemed herself too fortunate that day to find in the balconies, where respectable women rarely sit, a wretched stool beside Mesdames Duthé, Carline, and company."

"Three hundred people," says La Harpe, "dined at the Comédie in the actors' dressing rooms, in order to be more certain to obtain seats; and at the opening of the offices the crush was so great that three people were suffocated. That is one more than for Scudéry. . . . The first performance was very uproarious, as one can imagine, and *so extraordinarily long* that the audience was not dismissed until ten o'clock, although there was no short play; for Beaumarchais's comedy constituted the whole performance, which is in itself an additional novelty."

This extraordinary length was four hours, or four and a half, as the play began at half-past five.

Thus launched, after such a resistance, the play ran to more than one hundred performances, and was one of the great political and moral events of that time. Here it was no longer a question, as in the *Barbier*, of a mere merry, piquant, and amusing imbroglio; in the *Mariage* there was an armed Fronde,—everything that the public, since the play was prohibited, had fancied that they could see in it and had imported into it; all that the author himself had this time really

intended to put in it. Napoleon said of *Figaro* that "it was the revolution already under way." Sensible and moderate people of that time did not think differently. But when everybody is laughing, and when excitement is rife, of what avail are the previsions and reservations of a few minds against a contestant of the strength and impetuosity of Beaumarchais? There are times when it seems that society as a whole responds to the advice of the doctor as Figaro does: "Faith, monsieur, as men have little choice except between stupidity and folly, where I see no profit I propose at least to have some pleasure; so *vive la joie!* who knows whether the world will last three weeks longer?"

To depict this French audience of the first performance of *Figaro,* and its unbridled enthusiasm, two facts suffice: when the hero of the fleets, the Bailli de Suffren, entered the hall, he was applauded with frenzy; when, a moment later, the charming actress, Madame Dugazon, just recovered from a sickness of which the cause was only too well known, appeared in the front of her box, they applauded her no less warmly.

Such a play, in which society was represented in masks and in dishabille, as in a carnival of the Directory; where everything was taken apart and turned upside down,—marriage, maternity, the magistracy, the nobility, all the affairs of State; in which the master-lackey held the key from one end to the other,

and in which licence served as an aid to politics, became a manifest signal of revolution. I would not assert that Beaumarchais himself realised its full bearing; as I have said, he was drawn on by the currents of his epoch, and if it did happen that he accelerated their course, he never dominated them. We see him, throughout the whole period of the vogue of *Figaro,* busied with his play, like an experienced author who knows the rubric of the profession, and who thinks of nothing but making the very utmost out of it, in the way of sensation and enjoyment alike. At the fourth performance, from the third tier of boxes there rained down into the auditorium hundreds of printed copies of a satirical ballad against the play, which some persons attributed under their breath to a great personage, a prince (the future Louis XVIII), and in which that classic and sarcastic *bel-esprit* perhaps had a hand. But the printing and distribution, so it was confidently asserted, were done by secret order of Beaumarchais himself. It was a scheme of a sort said to be familiar to him: to seize upon a slander, a malicious trick of which he was the object, and to spread it abroad in order the better to answer it, in order to profit by it and to make friends of all the indignant gossips. A few days later, it was a letter from him that was circulated, and was said to be addressed to a duke and peer who had asked him for a small curtained box from which certain ladies of the Court could see the play without being seen.

"I have no respect, monsieur le duc," said Beaumarchais in the letter which was circulated in society, "for women who permit themselves to witness a play which they deem indecent, provided that they can witness it secretly; I do not lend my aid to such whims. I have given my play to the public to entertain and not to instruct, and not to afford false prudes the pleasure of thinking well of it in a box, on condition of speaking ill of it in society. The pleasures of vice and the honours of virtue,—such is the prudery of the age. My play is not an equivocal work; one must either acknowledge it or avoid it.

"I salute you, monsieur le duc, and I keep my box."

On going back to the source, it was discovered that the letter was not addressed to a duke and peer, and Beaumarchais himself acknowledged it, which took away materially from the boldness and insolence of the contents; it was addressed simply to Président Dupaty, a friend of the author, and was written "in the first heat of a slight disappointment." However, the effect was produced, and for several days it was an additional advertisment in fashionable society in favour of Figaro, who needed it so little.

It is said that, after the thirty-first performance of *Figaro,* the total receipts amounted to one hundred and fifty thousand francs. When the fiftieth was drawing near, Beaumarchais felt that some novelty was essential, in order to double that cape under full sail; and as charity was very fashionable at the time, he conceived the idea, partly sincere, of having recourse to it. The fiftieth performance therefore was given for the benefit of "poor wet-nurses"; and he wrote some new couplets with that in mind for the final vaudeville. Whereupon an epigram

was circulated which ended with these wretched lines:

"Il paye du lait aux enfants,
Et donne du poison aux mères."[1]

The epoch is well characterised by these chapters from Sterne, if we may so describe them, these acts of sentimental beneficence *à la Geoffrin,* which served as an interlude to the *Mariage de Figaro,* and which accompanied its triumph. A lover of the drama having taken it into his head to raise a quibble in the *Journal de Paris,* and to propound a question relative to the *petite Figaro,* who is mentioned in the *Barbier de Séville* by Rosine, and having expressed his surprise that there was no trace in the second play of this little Figaro who antedated the marriage, Beaumarchais answered cavalierly that the little one in question was no other than a poor adopted child of whom Figaro, at Seville, had taken charge for humanity's sake; that she had come to France since then and had married in Paris a poor but honest youth, a porter at Port Saint-Nicolas, named L'Écluze, who had been crushed to death, amid his comrades, by the machine used to discharge vessels.

"He has left," he added, "his poor wife, twenty-five years of age, with one child of thirteen months, and one a week old, which she is nursing, although she is very ill and in want of everything. Her husband's poor companions, touched by her sad lot, have contributed to keep her alive for awhile. They appealed to me this morning by the pen of their inspector. I have collaborated with them with pleasure,

[1] He buys milk for the children and gives the mothers poison.

and I do not doubt, monsieur, that you will do as much. I have therefore sent a louis for her to Monsieur Merlet, inspector at Port Saint-Nicolas, and I send two more with this letter," etc., etc.

All this was addressed to the publisher of the *Journal de Paris*. Whereupon, *louis d'or* came in showers for the poor wet-nurse thus indicated. The unfortunate woman reaped the benefit of it, and so did Beaumarchais, who, at the same stroke, accomplished a generous act, a mischievous hoax, and, furthermore, an ingenious advertisement, of an altogether new variety, of the *Mariage de Figaro,* which had reached its seventy-first performance.

This affair, however, had strange results and more serious than one would have supposed. There appeared in the *Journal de Paris* a letter marked by cold and cutting irony, ostensibly written by an ecclesiastic, who declared that there was little of good morals in this way of conferring alms on the poor woman by describing her as what she was not, and baptising her with the name of a comedy in which there was little that was honourable, after all, and which might be prejudicial to her child.

To this somewhat pedantic lecture, which was publicly addressed to him, Beaumarchais replied as he alone knew how to reply and, it may be, in a more serious and more animated tone than the subject required. He fancied that he had to deal in this discussion with no one of more importance than Suard, publisher of the *Journal,* and his ordinary adversary. He was

mistaken on one point. A more punctilious author, Monsieur le Comte de Provence (again the future Louis XVIII), was hidden behind this ironical outburst of the abbé. Angered by the tone of the reply, he complained of it, or some one complained for him, to Louis XVIII, who was annoyed by this constant disturbance over Beaumarchais, for whom he had little esteem. It was decided that Beaumarchais should be at once arrested, and taken, not to the Bastile (that would have been too noble for him), but to a penitentiary, to Saint-Lazare, where they confined, not prostitutes as yet, but scandalous priests, and dissipated sons of good families. Louis XVI, when he formed his determination, was at cards, and it was upon a card, the seven of spades, that he wrote, with the pencil with which he marked the *bêtes*,[1] that extraordinary order to arrest Beaumarchais and take him to Saint-Lazare (March 7, 1785).

The reader can judge of the sensation and amazement which this news produced in the public. When they came to arrest him, Beaumarchais was entertaining at supper the Prince de Nassau, Abbé de Calonne, brother of the contrôleur-général, and other persons of note. He was detained only six days, after which he was set at liberty. On the one hand, a hundred carriages in line came to his house to congratulate him; on the other, verses were written against him, and caricatures handed about in which he was ex-

[1] *Bête*,—money left on the table by the winner.

hibited beaten with rods by a monk, and in a ridiculous posture. He was deeply wounded by this affront, which fell upon him in the full tide of his triumph; he remained in retirement in his own house for some time, replying but rarely to the questions and letters of curious folk and admirers. In a reply which he did send to one of them, however, in June, 1785, we read:

"You ask me if it is true that the king has granted me essential aid in my present distress; I have no more reason for concealing the evidences of his justice than I had for concealing the profound affliction in which his unexpected wrath plunged me. The king, being deceived, punished me for an offence of which I was not guilty; but if my enemies did succeed in arousing his wrath, they have been unable to change his just disposition.

"Yes, monsieur, it is quite true that his Majesty has condescended to sign for me, since my disgrace, an order for the payment of 2,150,000 francs, on account of advances made long ago, the repayment of which I was soliciting from the king, while I was being accused of the detestable crime of failing in respect to him."

After this adventure of Saint-Lazare, and this reverse which marked the close of his "Day of Folly," Beaumarchais, being fifty-three years old, still had moments of celebrity and notoriety; but the wound remained unhealed; his influence entered upon its period of decline, his talent also degenerated, or at least, began to work at random. His finest moment had passed.

It certainly was not Beaumarchais who lost most by that odious and absurd confinement at Saint-Lazare, which happened so unexpectedly at the time of the

seventy-first performance of the *Mariage de Figaro* To be sure, the mystifier was himself mystified for the first time; the laughers were not all on one side. "The public laughed heartily at this incident," says a judicious witness; "more attention was paid to it than to a battle or a treaty of peace." However, when they saw that the prisoner was released after five or six days, without any precise cause being assigned for that act of severity which bordered upon ignominy, the public turned upon those who had ordered it. The executive power, ashamed of what had been done in a moment of irritation, retreated. Reparation was the order of the day. The performances of *Figaro* resumed their course; the seventy-second attracted no less numerous an audience than the first. It was observed that almost all the ministers were present. A letter from the contrôleur-général, Monsieur de Calonne, to Beaumarchais was quoted, in which that minister informed him that the king accepted his justification. With a delicacy which equalled and surpassed all possible apologies, the *Barbier de Séville* was acted at the Petit-Trianon by the queen's intimate circle, on August 19, 1785, and the actors were the queen herself, in the rôle of Rosine, the Comte d'Artois as Figaro, Monsieur de Vaudreuil playing Almaviva, etc. The author had the honour of being present at this exquisite performance. Finally, if Beaumarchais did recover a part of his funds as a trader, and did receive by way of arrears more than

two millions, he declined as a man of letters to accept a pension of more than a hundred francs upon the privy purse. They offered him much more; he deemed it his duty to reduce the amount himself to that modest figure, not choosing to see or to acknowledge therein anything more than the slight bond of a favour conferred.

But Beaumarchais was about to have to deal with adversaries more dangerous than the executive power itself. Like all men who have attained great renown and are much feared, but who do not govern themselves prudently, he was about to find himself face to face with men of talent, who were younger than he, and bold, enthusiastic, and eager for celebrity; who had their reputations to make, and for whom he was likely to become, if he did not look to it, a very appetising victim. Mirabeau, already well known by reason of tremendous scandals, and very little known as yet for any honourable reason, heaping pamphlets upon pamphlets, wrote one against the company called the *Compagnie des Eaux de Paris*. The Perrier brothers had undertaken to supply Paris with an abundance of healthful water, and at a lower price than had ever hitherto been reached; each house which subscribed was to receive through pipes all the water that it needed, all of which was very advantageous and most worthy of encouragement. The shares of the company had been carried to a very high figure, it may be by artificial means. Mirabeau, urged

on by his friend, the banker Clavière, fought the enterprise in order to depress the value of the shares. Beaumarchais entered the lists, defending the company and its manager; in my opinion, on the merits he was entirely right. But he chose to laugh at Mirabeau and his objections; recalling the criticisms which new undertakings had always had to undergo, "When they were very bitter," he said, "they were called 'Philippics'; perhaps some day some wretched joker will christen these with the pretty name of 'Mirabelles,' derived from the Comte de Mirabeau, *qui mirabilia fecit.*"—The maker of puns forgot whom he was playing against. After a long and outspoken discussion, which he concluded by wondering what motive could have induced a man of so great talent as the Comte de Mirabeau to "surrender his vigorous pen to factional interests which were not even his own," Beaumarchais was careful to close with a qualifying expression:

"Our esteem for his person," he said, "has frequently held in check the indignation which grew upon us while writing. But if, despite the moderation which we have imposed upon ourselves, any expression which he does not like has escaped us, we beg him to forgive us for it. We have combated his ideas, without ceasing to admire his style."

Mirabeau was hit; perhaps he desired to be; he rushed to the fray. Setting forth the motives, genuine or not, which had led him to enter the discussion, he marched straight for his adversary, and striking

him in the face with his sword, according to Cæsar's advice, he sneered at that assumption of patriotism, of disinterestedness, and of zeal for the public welfare with which Beaumarchais loved (and sincerely enough I think) to cover his own affairs and his financial speculations.

"Such were my motives," he cried, already in the tone of an orator, of a master powerful in retort and invective, "and it may be that they are not worthy of the age in which everything is done for honour, for glory, and *nothing for money;* in which *chevaliers d'industrie,* charlatans, merry-Andrews and panders have never had any other ambition than glory, *without the slightest thought of profit;* in which traffic in the city, speculation at Court, intriguing which lives upon exactions and upon prodigality, have no other aim than honour *without any selfish view;* in which a person despatches to America thirty ships loaded with rotten provisions, with useless ammunition, with old muskets which are sold for new, all for the glory of contributing to make a world free, and *in nowise for the possible profits of this unselfish expedition;* in which the masterpieces of a great man [an allusion to Beaumarchais' edition of Voltaire] are profaned by associating with them all his *juvenilia* and his *senilia,* all the musings which have escaped him in his long career, wholly for the glory, and *in nowise for the profit,* of being the editor of this monstrous collection; in which, to make a little sensation, and consequently, from love of glory and detestation of profit, the Théâtre-Français is changed into a puppet show, and the comic stage into a school of bad morals; in which all the orders of the State, all classes of citizens, all laws, all rules, all the proprieties, are torn asunder, insulted, and outraged."

Behold therefore Mirabeau become the avenger of the proprieties and of good morals against Beaumarchais, and Figaro passing his time unhappily in the hands of the mighty athelete who whirls him about and lifts him from the earth in the first round. Then

he asks Beaumarchais what he thinks now of his *Mirabelles*. Never was pun more roughly paid for. The peroration with which Mirabeau brought his pamphlet to a close is still famous in the world of invective:

"Do you, monsieur, who by misrepresenting my meaning and my motives have compelled me to treat you with a severity which nature has placed neither in my mind nor in my heart; you, whom I never provoked, and with whom war could be neither profitable nor honourable,—take my advice, profit by the bitter lesson which you have compelled me to administer to you. Withdraw your gratuitous eulogy; for I am unable to return it, from any point of view; withdraw the pitiful pardon for which you have asked me; take back even the impudent esteem which you have the hardihood to express for me."

And he concludes with this terrible advice, the most withering imaginable between men who are greedy of popularity before everything: "Think henceforward of nothing except deserving to be forgotten."

Beaumarchais held his peace under the insult; he had fallen in with a wrestler even more daring than himself, and with a sturdier frame; he was outclassed and beaten. His reign in public opinion really came to an end at that moment (1785–1786).

The Revolution of '89, at the outset, taught Beaumarchais how powerless he was before that vast flood which he had been among the first to set in motion, and which threatened him in its onward rush. Beyond question *Figaro* had paved the way for and presaged that Revolution; but, when the success of the tragedy

of *Charles IX*, by Marie-Joseph Chénier, gave the signal for it, and as it were, sounded the tocsin, Beaumarchais took fright. He addressed to the actors of the Comédie-Française some most judicious and far-sighted observations on this subject (November 9, 1786), in which he dwells upon the inconveniences and perils of the performance of such a play, which are so manifest under the circumstances. We see that it is with Beaumarchais as with all of us: we become prudent and sagacious the moment that our passions subside, that our selfish interests (including the interests of our talents and of our most cherished faculties) are out of danger; the man who brought Figaro into the world, who pushed him forward in spite of, and in opposition to all men, and who now had nothing of importance to add to his work, would fain cry "Halt!" to *Charles IX.*

In a word, there was in his case infinitely less of revolutionary *design* than in the case of Mirabeau, Chamfort, and many others. When his force of impulsion was exhausted, he had reached the age at which everything would have seemed well enough to him, provided that he could have his plays performed and be joyous and happy in his garden.

During these years great changes had taken place both in Beaumarchais' mode of life and in his sentiments. He had grown old rather early; he was still in good health, but quite deaf,—an excellent man, by the way, and more and more ingenuous as he withdrew

more and more into the intimate circle of his friends and his family. His life had become regular to a certain point. A son by his second marriage did not live; but he had a daughter whom he loved dearly, named Eugénie, and everything indicates that she was a charming girl. He was married a third time, March 8, 1786, to Marie-Thérèse-Émilie *Willermawla.*

In '89 he still lived on Vieille-Rue-du-Temple; but in that year he built his house, with the fine garden, at the corner of the boulevard, opposite the Bastille, which all of us may have seen in our youth. He went there to live in 1790, only to go forth a fugitive, and threatened with prosecution in '92. It was miraculous, in very truth, that that house escaped the devastating flood that daily swept from the faubourg and broke against it, as against a promontory. There were incessant domiciliary visits, threats of pillage and of burning; Beaumarchais was accused of creating a monopoly in grain, of collecting concealed weapons and storing them in subterranean passages which did not exist.

From the early days of '89 Beaumarchais was constantly in an attitude of apology and on the defensive. They tried to exclude him from the first Commune of Paris, of which he was a member; he was forced to defend himself by a petition in which he spoke grandiloquently of himself and of the services rendered by him in the American war. Doubtless he forgot many details which would have cast a shadow on the pic-

ture, but he was justified in speaking of his zeal for the public interest, and of the patriotic aspect in which he was always careful to place, and in which he himself always viewed, his private interest. He was justified above all in speaking of his readiness to oblige, and of his kindness, which had made so many ingrates.

His longing for an active life, for new undertakings, which had survived so many disappointments, led him, in March, 1792, to engage in an affair which had the colour of patriotism, and which steeped him in vexations. The project was to purchase sixty thousand, or perhaps *two hundred thousand* muskets in Holland and supply them to the French government, which, at the near approach of war, was sadly in need of them. He broached the subject to *fourteen* ministers, who succeeded one another in office in the course of a few months, and encountered nothing but inattention and constant temporising from them all, certain men in the departments being interested, not in causing the scheme to fall through, but in taking it out of Beaumarchais' hands in order to reap the profit of it themselves. In this matter Beaumarchais did not escape one of the disadvantages which men of the shrewdest intelligence are sometimes subject to in their old age. In the memorials which he addressed to the Convention on this subject, and which he divided into six "Epochs," he was unlucky enough (a strange and unexpected circumstance!) to become

tedious. Beaumarchais tedious! It is evident that he was; he is so to readers of to-day; he was so then to the very ministers whom he was pursuing with his incessant petitions, and who finally were utterly at a loss to evade his persistent requests for interviews. About the Tenth of August he was in danger of being massacred and was obliged to fly. But no matter! he thought of nothing but his muskets; he made it a point of honour to persist; it was his mania. He was imprisoned in the Abbaye; a few hours before the massacres in the prisons of the Second of September, he was set at liberty by the generosity of Manuel,[1] who went to him and said: "Leave this place instantly."

"I threw my arms about him," cries Beaumarchais theatrically, "unable to utter a single word; my eyes alone depicted the emotions of my heart; I believe that they were most expressive if they depicted all that I thought! I am as steel against injustice, but my heart softens, my eyes melt in tears at the slightest mark of kindness of heart. I shall never forget that man or that moment. I went away."

He went away, but he went to the department to follow up the affair of the muskets. During a discussion in the Council, to which he was admitted, he had difficulty in hearing Danton, although he spoke quite loud.

"M. Danton was seated on the other side of the table; he began the discussion; but as I am almost deaf, I rose and begged to be excused if I went nearer to the minister (because I could not hear well at a distance), and making a little trumpet with my hand as usual."

[1 *Procureur-Général* of the Commune, and prominent in the proceedings of the 10th of August, and 2nd of September, 1792.—Tr.]

This made the ministers laugh, Danton with the rest; but Beaumarchais did not laugh; he had ceased to laugh. He insisted that the nation should have its muskets,—that it should have them *in spite of itself.* It is hard to understand such obstinacy.

"I am a dismal kind of a bird," said Beaumarchais justly enough, "for I have but one song, which for five months past has consisted in saying to all the ministers in succession: 'For Heaven's sake, Monsieur, settle the matter of the muskets in Holland!' The whole world is afflicted with vertigo."

He might have added: "And I with the rest."

Deaf as he had grown, he did not seem to have formed a very accurate idea of the general situation. At London, where he fled for refuge towards the end of 1792, he received a letter from his clerk, who held his power of attorney, informing him that he had gone to the War Department and had applied to a Sieur Hassenfratz (the scholar). "I began by asking him if I had the honour of speaking to Monsieur Hassenfratz; whereupon, with haggard eye, flushed cheeks, and clenched fist, he shouted at me in a voice of thunder and with an expression of frantic rage: 'You have not the honour; I am not monsieur; my name is Hassenfratz!'" It was when things were in this state that Beaumarchais was innocent enough to return from London and put himself in the hands of the Convention, in order to argue the same old cause, and to clear himself from the denunciation of Lecointre, whose errors and injustice he made clear

beyond question. At the end of his sixth "Epoch," or memorial, we read, after a quatrain worthy of Pibrac, this naïve signature: "*The citizen, always persecuted,* Caron Beaumarchais.—Finished for my judges, this 6th of March, 1793, *in the second year of the Republic.*" Wholly engrossed by his one object, he had no very clear idea what the National Convention was; the surprising thing is that he saved his head.

Having left France once more and taken refuge in Hamburg during the following years, he lived there in poverty; he was so poor (M. de Lomenie, his biographer, tells me) that he had to save half of a match to use the next day. The thought of his family and of his darling daughter sustained him. He saw her again in 1796, and soon after returned to his house, to that lovely garden which he had peopled with statues, cenotaphs, and souvenirs, and where he had had all sorts of inscriptions carved, according to the fashion of the age.

His self-love had one last moment of enjoyment when, the Théâtre Français having revived his drama *La Mère Coupable,* which he wrote in 1791, he was loudly called for and was dragged upon the stage, where he had to appear with Molé, Fleury, and Mademoiselle Contat. He keenly relished this crowning applause, and said to himself that the public must have become more moral since it greeted favourably so excellent a work. After discharging

all the fireworks of his wit, Beaumarchais had unconsciously recurred to his original Grandisonian tendencies. But paternity had led him back, instinctively and in thought, to the moral and virtuous drama, and he often repeated in his old age that "every man who is not born a detestable villain always ends by becoming a good man when the age of passions has passed, and above all when he has tasted the exquisite joy of being a father!"

He died at Paris during the night of the 17th and 18th of May, 1799, of an apoplectic attack, it is said, of which he had had no warning; he fell asleep for ever during his sleep. He was only sixty-seven years old. A few persons, of whom I will mention Esménard, author of the article on Beaumarchais in the *Biographie Universelle*, M. Népomucène Lemercier, and M. Beuchot, seemed thoroughly convinced that Beaumarchais delivered himself (by means of the poison called by the name of Cabanis) from a life which had become too burdensome because of penury, and too painful. His family and friends have contradicted this rumour and this belief, which, as time passed, had obtained some credit. Those who have no other interest than to ascertain the truth will find no difficulty in attributing his death to apoplexy, reserving at most a very slight doubt thereupon.

Jacques Necker.

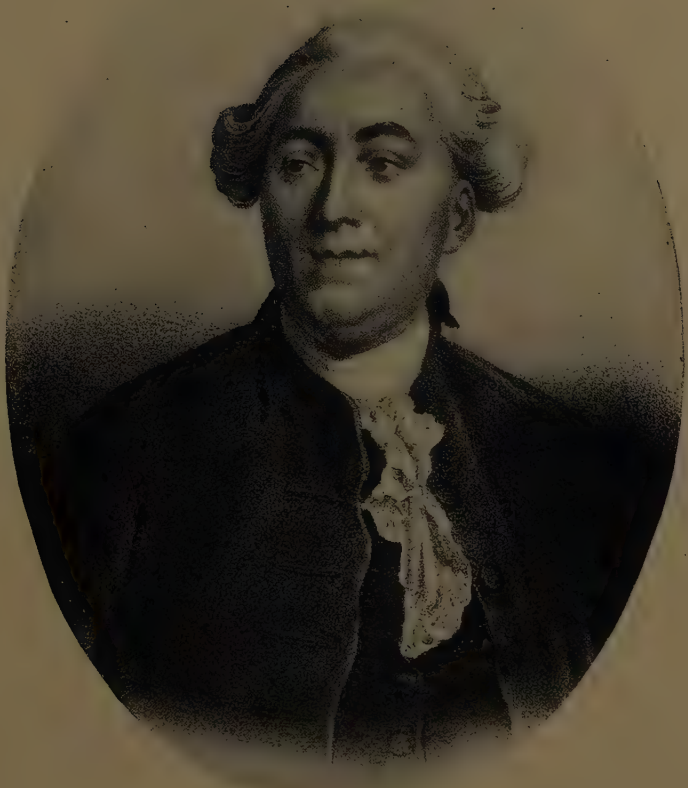
1732-1804.

Jacques Necker.

AMONG the illustrious foreigners who became naturalised in France during the eighteenth century, not one had more influence, or a more direct influence, on our destinies, than M. Necker. From the political standpoint everything seems to have been said about him, and both the *pro* and the *contra* are exhausted. This political aspect of the man tempts me very little; but there is a way of studying M. Necker which not only is worn less threadbare, but is less strewn with thorns: that way is, to read him as an author who, having written a good deal, has had much to say about himself, and who has painted himself in unmistakable colours. M. Necker left no less than fifteen volumes of works; I do not advise everybody to attempt to read them; it is for the critic to undertake that task, and, after reading carefully, to select those portions which may help to depict the man, whether in respect to his moral character or in respect to his literary form and spirit; for M. Necker had some literary influence among us. When we have come to know him in this aspect, we shall have sufficient light on the subject of politics, and many consequences will follow of themselves.

This distinguished man was born at Geneva, September 30, 1732; his father was a professor of law, born at Küstrin, Prussia, who had settled in Calvin's city, and who traced his own origin to an Irish family. Young Necker was destined at an early age for the banking profession. He received an excellent home education, and began the study of the classics, but, according to all appearances, he went but a little way in that direction. The studies which he was compelled to take he paid but little attention to, so it was said, and in order to arouse his interest, it was necessary that he should propose them himself. Only by dint of prolonged inward labour was he destined to reach the height that he finally attained.

He was sent to Paris, to the banking-house of a Genevese. It is said that, even in those days, he sought the latest literary works, and that he even tried his own hand at composition; he was singularly shrewd in grasping certain social shortcomings, and he wrote several little comedies which remained in his portfolio. In fact, business soon engrossed his entire attention, and he exhibited abundant capacity therefor. Having become a partner and one of the managing men in a banking-house, he gave evidence, in his various speculations, of more than ordinary sagacity, and of a genius for laying plans which was rewarded by great wealth. But with all his success in business, he had retained from childhood one peculiar characteristic which seemed in every respect



JACQUES NECKER.

From an old painting.

the opposite of an enterprising spirit. Being a thinker by nature, he was never willing to make up his mind about anything except for sufficient reasons.

"His mind," says a person who knew him well (the same M. Meister whom we have seen in Grimm's service), "his mind was accustomed to consider all the aspects of a matter so carefully and with so much thought, his forethought was so sensitive and so cautious, that, even under the most urgent circumstances, he was impressed solely by the difficulties of any decision that he might make, and never made up his mind except by force, so to speak, to attempt what he did attempt."

When, later, it was a matter of guiding the chariot of State on a steep incline, and there was not an instant to lose, we can understand that this inborn indecision was likely to be fatal; in the ordinary affairs of life it was simply an interesting peculiarity. He liked to attribute in part to the obstacles that he encountered the fault that was an essential feature of his character. The biographer whom I quoted just now, and who had passed much time in his company, said: "I do not think that I ever left him more thoroughly content with my praise than when I assured him that a very determined will seemed to me almost incompatible with great breadth, great shrewdness, and great superiority of mind."

But having thus gone straight to the heart of our subject at the outset, we must retrace our steps. M. Necker, enriched by fortunate operations, and still a young man, having married Mademoiselle Curchod, who worshipped intellect, maintained in Paris, from

1765, an establishment which became almost immediately the meeting-place of the most illustrious *philosophes* and literary men. His attitude in his wife's salon was peculiar: although it was with him in mind, and in a large measure to gratify him and to assist and enhance his renown, that she exerted herself to collect about her that brilliant and select circle, he was simply a silent and cold spectator. Marmontel observes that M. Necker's silence and gravity of demeanour, which many people have attributed to a touch of vanity, but which he (Marmontel) noticed before his elevation, were due principally to discretion and caution.

One of the best witnesses of that time, Madame du Deffand, whose acquaintance the Neckers made in 1773, has described them, both wife and husband, especially the latter, with an accent of verity which leaves nothing to be desired from a social point of view.

"They desired to know me," she says, "because people had given me the reputation of a *bel-esprit* who does n't care for *beaux-esprits;* that seemed to them a rarity worthy of being inquired into."

She blames herself at first for yielding to their wish; but soon, after she comes to know M. Necker, she ceases to regret her compliance; she sees him frequently at Paris and Saint-Ouen; at first sight, she prefers him to all the Encyclopædists, Economists, and the rest; she studies and strives to comprehend

by degrees his type, his originality, and his measure of attractiveness.

There are days when M. Necker pleases her so much in conversation,—days when he lets himself go,—that she detects a resemblance to Horace Walpole and ventures to avow it: "Necker has much wit; he is not far from resembling you in some respects." Walpole was not of her opinion; Monsieur and Madame Necker went to England in the spring of 1776, and on their return Madame du Deffand writes:

"They did not please you much, I can see; they are both bright, but especially the man. I admit that he lacks one of the qualities which go farthest to make a man agreeable, namely a certain facility in conversation which imparts wit, so to speak, to those with whom one is talking; he does not help you to develop your thoughts, and one is more stupid with him than when alone or with other people."

This judgment of Madame du Deffand concerning M. Necker is in some sort definitive, considering him as a society man; he talks well when he consents to talk, but his conversation is not helpful to others; with him one finds in one's self no unsuspected fund of wit. This distinctive trait he has in common with the distinguished men who are described by the name "doctrinaires," and who tried, in their day, to give a new tone, a new ply, to French wit.

Another trait which M. Necker seemed also to have communicated to them, and which was allied to the preceding, was the entertaining a profound respect for, and proclaiming aloud, the rights of mankind; the

estimating the human race at more than its real worth, perhaps, and at the same time not always according to the individuals with whom he was brought in contact the degree of esteem to which they were justly entitled. Herein there was a substantial contradiction, which we may detect without difficulty in the leaders of that aristocratic family of intellects, from M. Necker to M. Royer-Collard. It was an extraordinary oversight and negligence, due to self-esteem, on the part of those superior minds: they judged mankind by themselves and they ranked it very high; they judged other individuals by themselves likewise, and when they found that they did not measure up to their standard and were not cast in the same mould, they deemed them vastly inferior and altogether insignificant.

M. Necker's face and physique were well adapted to create an impression in Parisian society by virtue of his noble, imposing, and rather unusual aspect. "His features resemble no one else's; the shape of his face is extraordinary." It was his wife who said that, and others noticed it no less. He had a large head and a long face; the forehead and chin especially were disproportionately long. His brown eyes, bright and intelligent, and at times charmingly soft or profoundly melancholy, were surmounted by very high eyebrows, which gave to his face a most peculiar expression. In a word, his face was not of a French type. He became very stout and heavy after he passed thirty, and

this tendency increased with his age. There was in his temperament a substratum of passive meditation, of lofty tranquillity, and of sloth, which he could surmount only with the aid of the most exalted incentives to action, and by his passionate love of dignified praise.

At first he wrote only upon subjects connected with his regular employments. The first work which directed public attention to him was the *Éloge de Colbert,* crowned by the Académie Française in 1773. M. Necker, having made a fortune, had just retired from the banking business; he had been appointed minister of the Republic of Geneva to the Court of Versailles, and he aimed still higher; he aspired to a political career in France. His *Éloge de Colbert* was not so much an academic discourse as a programme for the ministry. To give his readers an idea of Colbert, he thought it necessary to begin by describing the character of the ideal finance minister,—such an one as Colbert may have been, but, above all, such an one as M. Necker aspired to be.

Guided by a sort of tact foreign to the French character, M. Necker was present in his own salon when his wife read a "Portrait" of him, written in 1787; a portrait wherein his praises are sung in every key, wherein the word genius is scattered broadcast, as well as the most subtle and refined comparisons; wherein, amid an incongruous medley of similes and images, M. Necker appears successively as a living

picture, an angel, a chemical substance, a lion, a hunter, a vestal virgin, an Apollo, a majestic bridge, an Albanian dog, a volcanic mountain, a pillar of fire, a cloud, a mirror, a hearthstone, a mine, the insect that produces coral, one of the genii of the Arabs, etc. He listened to this portrait when his wife read it before witnesses, as if it referred to a third person, and he afterwards included it in the volume of *Mélanges* by her, which he published in 1798.

M. Necker's second work, which was successful in spite of its subject, or, rather, because of its subject, which was then the fashion, was that entitled *Sur la Législation et le Commerce des Grains,* which appeared in 1775. It was an attack upon the arbitrary theories of the Turgot ministry, and upon the Economists, who desired entire freedom of exportation. M. Necker repeated therein, in a most unpractical form, divers truths proved by experience; it was noticed afterward that he spoke of property and land-owners rather slightingly, and that he represented those who live by toil, or the proletariat, as their victims. "They are as lions and defenceless animals living side by side," he said; "we cannot increase the share of the latter except by eluding the others' vigilance and not giving them time to spring." In attacking Turgot as "one who has only the desire for greatness without the force to attain it," he seemed to point to himself clearly enough, in more than one place, as a minister much to be preferred. "If," he said, "there were

always at the head of the government a man whose far-reaching genius takes account of every circumstance; whose *plastic and flexible mind* is able to bring his plans and his wishes into conformity with those circumstances; who, being endowed with an ardent soul and calm judgment," etc. If a man is not thinking of himself when he talks in this strain and describes so complacently him whom events are calling, it shows a lack of tact at least, because he makes everybody think that he has himself in mind.

I will not dwell upon this work, of which Madame du Deffand said: "I have just read a few chapters of M. Necker, and I found it brain-splitting toil"; and of which Voltaire wrote about the same time: "Have you read Necker's book, and if you have, did you understand it as you read?" The book such as it was, skilfully put together, half understood, half read, with its blending of oratorical and emotional passages with obscure theories, created the greatest impression in the then state of men's minds, and hastened the accession of M. Necker to the ministry.

His first ministry, which lasted five years, from October 22, 1776, to May 19, 1781, seems to me to have been treated with perfect justice by M. Droz, in his *Histoire de Louis XVI:* he does full justice to his noble aims, to his disinterestedness in the matter of money, to his zeal for the partial reformation of abuses, and to the various improvements, economic and humane, which he succeeded in introducing. At the

same time he points out M. Necker's weak side,—his excessive fondness for praise, his veneration for public opinion, which he at that time thought only of following and of satisfying, without apparently suspecting how worthless and fickle it was. M. Necker afterward regretted this early worship of opinion; glancing backward after his second ministry, in 1791, he cried, still with a sort of *naïveté:* "I do not quite understand why public opinion is no longer what it once was in my eyes. The respect which I religiously paid to it faded away when I saw how submissive it was to the artifices of the evil-minded, when I saw it tremble before the same men whom formerly it would have summoned before its tribunal, to hold them up to shame and to brand them with the stamp of its reprobation."

But at the time of his first ministry, public opinion in France, in the first society, seemed a spotless queen, to whom a statesman whose aims were pure had only to intrust himself without reserve in order to walk in the straight path. Therein lay M. Necker's illusion, by virtue of which it appeared that he was simply a man of boundless intellect, and not a really great minister. As a result of the excessive relaxation of the ruling powers, of the degeneration of morals, and of a sort of slow and universal dissolution, there was no longer in the France of that day a substantial and solid dike between the great mass of the nation and the king; the various bodies and orders of the

State no longer had the strength to subsist by themselves, and to resist, on the day when their existence should be seriously brought in question, and there should be only a throne left standing, in the midst of a vast, moving plain. Now, what was public opinion in such a State? A vague breath, which, so long as it was mild and favourable, suggested the idea of the ocean during a calm, but which, so soon as it should blow from a different quarter and become irritated, would inevitably raise a tempest.

M. Necker, face to face with this public opinion which he did not distrust, doubtless thought before everything of doing what was right, always on condition that he should do it to his own greater honour and glory. When, in January, 1781, he published his famous *Compte Rendu au Roi,* and, himself a minister, summoned the whole nation to discuss those perplexing subjects, he could not resist the temptation to glorify himself, and to congratulate himself upon his early successes, rather than to devote his energies to following them up in silence and strengthening their foundations for the future. It was his pleasure to represent himself, in the very first lines of this *Compte Rendu,* as a man of self-abnegation and sacrifice; he was capable of many sacrifices, it is true, always excepting that of the approbation which he hoped to reap from them.

On leaving the ministry, to which he was not to return for seven years, when circumstances would

prove to be too strong for him, he continued to live in society, encompassed by almost universal favour and adulation.[1] He wrote first of all upon the government, and upon political questions; but before long, seeking, in his instinct for meditation, a more exalted and vaster diversion amid the tedium of inaction, he composed his book *De l'Importance des Idées Religieuses,* and combated the false doctrines that were widespread about him. In the interval, he had conceived the idea of writing about men and their social characteristics, and, although he left only fragmentary remarks and *Pensées* upon this subject, he depicted himself perfectly in an unexpected aspect. M. Necker as a moralist is a very shrewd, very interesting, and too much neglected writer.

Kind-hearted, but inclined to be disdainful and unindulgent mentally, with very keen and discriminating powers of observation, he had reflected deeply upon the race of fools, who, according to him, swarm in this world. He thought that it was difficult for a

[1] The word adulation is none too strong. The enthusiasm that M. Necker aroused among his admirers resembled the fanaticism of a religious sect. Even the gentle and lovely Duchesse de Lauzun attacked in a public garden a stranger who spoke slightingly of M. Necker, shortly after his dismissal, and forgot herself so far as to insult him. The Comte de Crillon said one day: "If the universe and I should hold one opinion, and M. Necker should express a different one, I should at once be convinced that the universe and I were wrong." [Said Barnave: "Necker was the first man in our day to enjoy what is called popularity."—Tr.]

man to hold the opinion of himself which he ought to hold.

"The men who deem themselves perfect are happy, but ridiculous. The men who constantly find fault with themselves are estimable but unfortunate. It is hard to observe a just *milieu*. One should view oneself at a distance and pass judgment upon oneself without partiality and without bitterness, as a simple acquaintance."

But while passing judgment upon himself in this way and in the capacity of a simple acquaintance, it would seem that M. Necker was never dissatisfied with himself.

The little essay which he entitled *Le Bonheur des Sots* was extremely relished in society in the eighteenth century. Many people to-day, who are at odds with M. Necker on account of his ministries, would be reconciled to him if they should read this piquant essay, wherein a man supposed to be serious-minded proves himself as refined a satirist as ever Rulhière could have been. They would learn there to know a Necker who was not at all tedious. He lays it down as a principle that "to be happy, one must be a fool." Folly, in his judgment, is like that first garment of skin which God bestowed upon Adam and Eve before driving them from Paradise.

"This robe of skin, which is intended to cloak our nudity, consists of the attractive errors, the sweet confidences, the fearless judgment of ourselves,—

blissful gifts, to which our corrupt age has given the name of folly, and which our ingratitude seeks to misrepresent."

And he enumerates all the treasures which are contained therein. For example: the fool never learns by experience; though he should live two hundred years, nature would still be in his eyes young and fresh; there is no connection between his ideas; he rushes wildly about on the last day as on the first; to the end, he lives in the surprise and delight of childhood. Another blessing: a fool never doubts; he is never troubled by a multitude of ideas and of points of view; is never a prey to hesitation, that torment of men of intellect. The distinguishing characteristic of folly is always to take the limits of its vision for the limits of what really is. One can imagine all that an impassive, satirical pen could make of this outline. It is all done in a tone of persiflage, and with irony rather than merriment. In a clever postscript, M. Necker observes that there is a semi-folly which makes those who have inherited it very unhappy: the fools who have an idea that perhaps they are slightly foolish, the fools *who catch a glimpse of themselves,* are as unhappy as the genuine fools are happy. Despite this exception, which occurs to him as an afterthought, the general theory holds good, and there is surely one proverb lacking in the list: "Happy as a fool."

This charming paper, which resembles Fontenelle

and Marivaux even more than La Bruyère, entertained the eighteenth century immensely, and every one imagined that he recognised his neighbour therein. After reading it I still have one difficulty, and that is, how to reconcile, in the author, so shrewd and, in substance, so contemptuous a description of the folly considered by him to be almost universal since Adam, with his unbounded respect for mankind as a whole, and with his constant veneration of present opinion.

No matter what one may say, regret is inevitable upon ceasing to be a minister, especially when one has had the experience of M. Necker in his first ministry, surrounded by public approbation and applause. Marmontel was at Saint-Brice when he learned of M. Necker's disgrace; he hurried to Saint-Ouen to call upon him, and especially upon Madame Necker, to whom he had vowed unbounded regard. He passed the whole evening alone with them and a brother of M. Necker.

"Neither the husband nor the wife," he said, "concealed their profound depression from me. I tried to lessen it by speaking of the regret which they left in the public mind, and of the well-merited regard which would follow them in their retirement; wherein I did not flatter them. 'I do not regret,' said M. Necker to me, 'anything except the good that I still had to do, and that I would have done if they had given me time.'"

The various works which M. Necker composed in the following years (1781–1788) bear the stamp of that keen and tender sensibility which he takes no pains to conceal. It was to distract his thoughts, to relieve and occupy his mind, that he conceived the

idea of his estimable work against the atheists, the unbelievers, and the mocking spirits of the time, which he entitled *De l'Importance des Idées Religieuses* (1788).

The striking thing about M. Necker in religious matters is his perfect sincerity, the profound and convincing sentiment which finds expression in his words, and which often replaces metaphysics by a touching moral lesson. In the fine passages there is something of the emotional preacher. At the time when Mirabeau was already stirring up his Provence, and when the signal for the States-General was ringing through the air, "What a time," cried M. Necker in conclusion, "what a time I have chosen to discourse to the world upon morality and religion! and, too, what a theatre this is for such an undertaking! Every one is busy about his harvest; every one lives in his own affairs; every one is swallowed up in the present moment."

I have mentioned the word "preacher"; that is the word which best befits the sort of talent that M. Necker displays in this class of ideas and of religious meditations. He realised it so well that, in 1800, toward the close of his life, he published a *Cours de Morale Religieuse,* divided into discourses which are supposed to be delivered by a pastor to his flock. I particularly recommend the one entitled *De l'Union Conjugale,* which overflows with sentiment and beauty. I find, in M. Necker's last thoughts,

outbursts of hope which attain a sort of splendour of expression.

"There is some magnificent secret concealed behind this superb proscenium which forms the spectacle of the world."—"We will not believe that our imagination soars beyond the present time to supply us with a mere plaything; we should not be worth the trouble of being deceived, of being deceived with such ostentation, if we were destined to enjoy only an ephemeral existence."

By these various religious works, in which he carefully avoided touching upon points which might have suggested disagreement with the Catholic Church, M. Necker, as we see, was one of the most honourable precursors of the great movement which burst forth at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and his collection of discourses antedated by only two years the *Génie du Christianisme*.[1]

Let us come now to the minister, that is to say, to the moral man in the minister, and let us scrutinise him. On re-entering politics, M. Necker retains all his honesty and his early modesty, but he recovers his sensitiveness, his "haughty judgment," his "proud heart" (it is himself who thus describes them), and the disdain which he readily forgets in solitary and placid meditation, but which reawakens in the presence of men. His political career is sharply divided into two parts. In his first ministry, which lasted five years, he struggles against the courtiers and against abuses, and he falls, he retires, because of his inflexibility and his lack of adroitness, before old Maurepas,

[1] [Chateaubriand's greatest work.—Tr.]

whom it was a question simply of wearing out and allowing to die. In his second and third ministries, which lasted two years in all, from August, 1788, to September, 1790, and which were separated by a brief exile, by a triumphant return, and by the ineffaceable date of the fourteenth of July,[1]—in these last two ministries, which really form but one, knowing what ground to take with respect to the Court and courtiers, M. Necker does not change his opinion concerning the common people and the main body of the nation; he transfers to them his illusions and his confidence; he conceives the idea of an altogether amiable, impressible nation, easy to guide and to lead back, free from corruption and from vices, and he does not abandon that idea until the last extremity. Failing again, this time before the Constituent Assembly and before Mirabeau, he cries once more, recurring to the moderate methods which he had projected to secure the salvation of France, and contrasting them to those which have prevailed:

"What methods have been preferred to mine! Whereas, with *a little* restraint in their theories, with *a little* regard for the oppressed, with *a little* consideration for the old-fashioned opinions, and above all with *a little* love and kindness, the whole of France might have been led back to happiness by bonds of silk." He wrote this at Coppet in 1791. At that date, he still believed that with all these "littles"

[1] [The Bastille fell on July 14, 1789.—Tr.]

combined and accepted by all, he could have held out against the torrent and transformed it into a placid canal.

There is one work of M. Necker's which enables us to study him as a man and as a politician, — I refer to the apology for his administration, written by himself in 1791, immediately after his retirement to Switzerland and before the Revolution had brought forth its last excesses. This work, which is seldom read, is equivalent to a confession. The author, still excited by his fall and by the ingratitude of the Assembly, and not foreseeing that, in the woes which are preparing to burst upon all heads, this premature retirement will prove to be a decided benefit to him,—in fact, his salvation,—the author gives free rein to all his thoughts; he lays bare his soul, all bleeding and groaning; he exhibits it in all its sensitiveness, in its amazement, in its sufferings of all sorts, in its natural, honourable, upright, human passions. He would not have dared to write thus two years later, after 1793, for he was surely one of the privileged ones of fate; but in 1791 he believed himself to be a victim selected out of all the rest, and he groaned in spirit. In the lyrical agitation of his heart, M. Necker at that moment considered no metaphor too lofty for his individual plight; amid all these reproaches of ingratitude that he breathes forth, it still seems to him that he indulges in clemency: "Like the Prophet, having come upon the mountain to curse, I remain only to bless."

Such a tremendous upheaval of the heart, although his situation was really bitter and painful, goes beyond what we have a right to expect from a steadfast statesman, who has measured in advance the roads over which he must travel; the fact is that M. Necker was nothing less than such a statesman, and he is the first to tell us so. Let us leave the details to the historian. Did M. Necker do well to play fast and loose as he did, as the session of the States-General drew near? to summon the Notables again, and to allow them to discuss the form of the approaching representation, instead of having a plan decided upon at the outset? Did he do well to wait so long before declaring in favour of the double representation of the Third Estate? to allow the Assembly to open its sessions, without compelling the king to take the initiative in the measures that were in dispute? to give the Orders time to become irritated in preliminary discussions which might have been cut short? Did he do well to repel in that first critical hour, by his scornful reception of them, the sincere overtures of Mirabeau? Was he wrong or right not to be present at the royal sitting of the 23rd of June, when the king made a speech of which he did not approve? Let us lay aside all these questions and many others, which would only result in progress too slow and too indirect for us; but let us listen to himself in his apology and in his avowals.

It is very true that in the beginning of 1789 he found himself placed, as he says, between the throne and

the nation, and invested with the twofold confidence of both, amid the greatest difficulties in which a minister was ever called upon to choose his course. His extraordinary claim, which condemns him at once, is that he committed no mistake.

"In such a situation," he says, "and amid the most ardent passions, in the centre of all the enmities and hatreds that were rife, there was evidently an opportunity every day to take some false step, and some false step of the utmost moment. That is a reflection which I often suggested to the king's other ministers; and although I am unfortunately inclined to be anxious; although throughout my life I have constantly cast my eyes backward in order to judge myself anew in respect to matters that have passed; although my mind is thus burdened with all the remorse in which my conscience has never had a share,—nevertheless, and to my own amazement, I seek in vain for anything to reproach myself for."

A surprising result in very truth, and one which, if I may venture to suggest as much, is well adapted to characterise the whole flock of doctrinaire minds after their fall. Though the State had crumbled after them, and partly through their instrumentality, be well assured that they never made any mistake; they had nothing to reproach themselves for, and with their hands on their hearts and their heads erect in God's sight they would swear it. In M. Necker, the first, the purest in intention, and the most innocent of them all, this fearlessness of conscience and this assurance of impeccability were combined with a strain of *bonhomie*. Many people since his day have spoken of the perfect harmony between morality and politics; he did not simply speak of it, he believed in it, and

guided his conduct by it as scrupulously as possible under all circumstances; but he understood morality in the strict and special sense of the good man acting in the sphere of private life.

The moment of vertigo and of intoxication, the apogee of his life, was his return after the fourteenth of July, when he received at Bâle letters from the king and from the National Assembly, recalling him. His return to France was a triumph. The first impulse of his kind heart was to demand the cessation of violent measures, pardon and amnesty for those who were being prosecuted, and who were already being murdered as enemies of the nation. He obtained everything that he asked at the Hôtel de Ville, at the outset, and he expressed the feelings by which he was then agitated in terms which do honour to the man and which also show how readily his hopes were aroused:

"I wish that I had enough room," he says, after giving us the amnesty decree prepared at the Hôtel de Ville, "to transcribe here the names of all of those,—such a vast number,—who benefit by this memorable act. I shall never forget you, who have caused me to enjoy for a moment the ecstasy of a century,—you, my only benefactors! Ah! how happy I was that day! Each of those moments is engraved on my memory. I had obtained the return of peace, I had obtained it without other means than the language of reason and of virtue; that thought laid hold upon me through all the emotions of my heart, and I thought for a moment that I was between heaven and earth. Ah! how happy I was as I returned to Versailles! but alas! as I have said, that felicity, that too sublime joy, was of brief duration!"

After his return to France, at the end of July, 1789,

M. Necker's influence rapidly diminished and faded away; the leading spirits of the Assembly made it their business to foil him and to ruin his popularity in every way, at the same time that the Court faction was incessantly making sport of him and annoying him with the utmost bitterness. He was between two fires. He continued to render daily services for the subsistence of the capital and to provide for the needs of the treasury; but he was soon to be outstripped and made of no account in financial matters by an Assembly which decreed the seizure of the property of the clergy and the issue of *assignats*. When he left the ministry, in September, 1790, and went away from France for ever, a little more than a year after his splendid triumph, M. Necker was forgotten. It was this indifference which tore his heart more than all the rest. In the work published by him, and intended to combat this indifference, he enumerated all the claims that he had to the gratitude of the nation, and did not forget to add the money that was owed him. He had always been disinterested in such matters; he had declined during his various ministries the salary of minister of finance and the perquisites which were attached to that office; he did not hesitate to recall that fact with a pomp which certainly balanced his disinterestedness. "And so," he cried, "the National Assembly can treat me with indifference at its pleasure,—I shall none the less continue to be a creditor of the State in several ways, and

never have I enjoyed that privilege so much, never have I borne myself more magnificently."

The misfortunes of others, especially those of his virtuous king, abated his own chagrin to some extent, and in the following years he recovered his moderation of thought and the control of his pen when he wrote. The works which he subsequently composed in the capacity of spectator, and whose subject was the French Revolution considered in the various phases of its development, contain a multitude of judicious, subtle, elevated ideas, and the most honourable aspirations. During the Reign of Terror, he wrote some philosophical reflections upon the false idea of equality; he set forth the sense in which, according to his opinion, we ought to understand that men are equal in God's sight; and there again we find the traces of that aristocracy of mind of which even the Christian in M. Necker could never rid himself.

"O God!" he said, "all men are equal doubtless before Thee, when they commune with thy goodness, when they address their complaints to Thee, and when their happiness engages thine attention; but if Thou hast permitted that there should be an image of Thee upon earth, if Thou hast at all events permitted finite beings to exalt themselves to the conception of thine everlasting existence, it is only to man in his perfection that Thou hast granted this precious privilege; to the man who has succeeded by degrees in developing the noble system of his moral faculties; in a word, to man, *when he shows himself in all the glory of his intellect.*"

"The glory of the intellect!" It seems to me that that is not exactly the doctrine of the Gospel; it seems

to me that the apostle, and after him Saint Augustine, Bossuet, and all the great Christians, have remarked this very glory and pride of the intellect as one of the most subtle perils and most to be dreaded by lofty minds.

Once rescued from the tempest and seated upon the shore, M. Necker becomes once more a very distinguished political writer and essayist; he analyses and criticises the various Constitutions which succeeded one another in France,—those of '91, of '93, of the year III, of the year VIII; he readily picks out their vices or their defects; then it is that he suggests and perfects at leisure his ideal of a limited monarchy and a government after the English form, to which he had given very little thought in the days when he held the helm. Disappointed and spurned in the present, he concludes almost all his works by eloquent and trustful appeals to the future, which is always vast and obscure enough to give, like the ancient oracles, responses to suit everybody.

In 1802 M. Necker published his *Dernières Vues de Politique et de Finance*. He continued to render public homage to the First Consul; considering the First Consul as a brilliant exception, and the Constitution of the year VIII as transitory, he tried to establish by theory the foundations of a more durable establishment. And herein he betrays himself most delightfully in all the natural indecision of his ideas: he proposes at the same time two parallel plans,—one a

perfect republic, the other a model monarchy; he constructs these two plans in turn with great skill in analysis, he balances them against each other, and having weighed them well in every point, he says to the man whom he has proclaimed to be necessary: "Take one of my plans or take the other." And if he takes neither of them, he finds consolation in the sight of his own ideal, and, like all self-satisfied theorists, he appeals to the future, and to that common sense which, in his judgment, is sooner or later "the arbiter of human life." It is interesting to observe how we always enjoin upon future generations the common sense which it is supposed that we have not.

M. Necker died at Coppet on March 30, 1894, in his seventy-second year.

Marie-Antoinette.

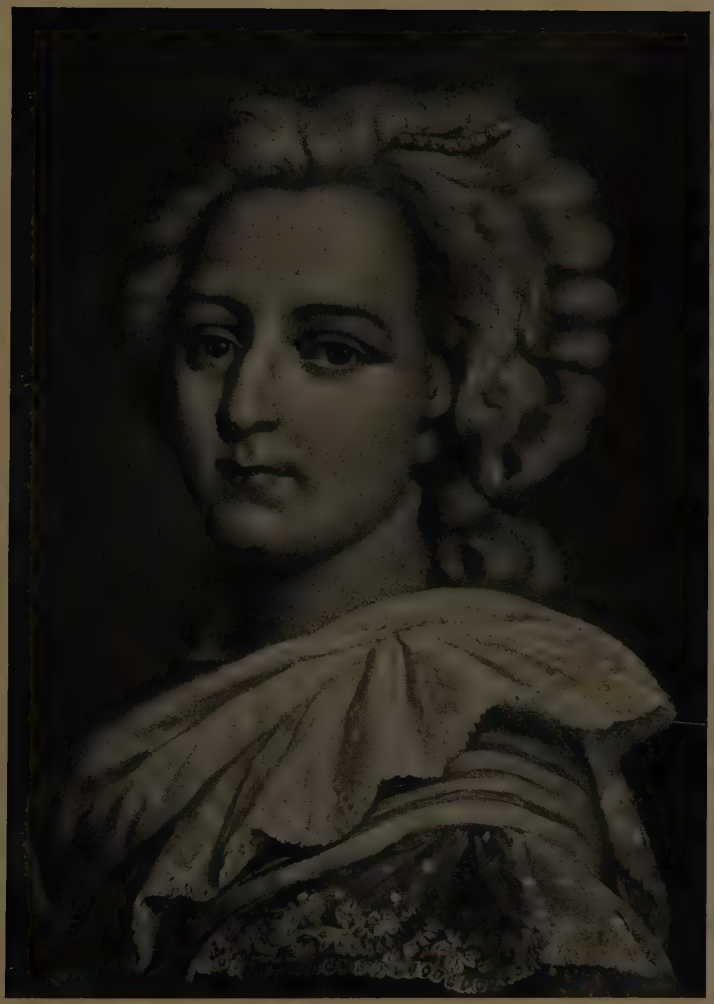
1755–1793.

Marie-Antoinette.

AMONG the works which are calculated to afford a just idea of Queen Marie-Antoinette and her character in the years of her youth and prosperity, I know of none which more effectively carries conviction to the reader's mind than the simple *Notice* of the Comte de la Marck, inserted by M. de Bacourt in the introduction to his recently published work upon Mirabeau. The Comte de la Marck sketches the queen's domestic life in a few pages marked by the closest observation. We see there a genuine and natural, not an exaggerated Marie-Antoinette. We foresee the errors in which her surroundings will inevitably involve her, those which will be attributed to her, and the weapons which she will unconsciously furnish to malignity. We regret that an observer so impartial and so superior has not drawn a similar portrait of the queen at the various epochs of her life, down to the hour when she became a noble victim, and when the lofty qualities of her heart manifested themselves so clearly as to impress and interest all mankind.

There is one way of viewing Marie-Antoinette

which seems to me the true way, and which I should like to define, because it seems to me that the final judgment of history should be formed from that standpoint. A person may, influenced by an exalted feeling of compassion, become imbued with an ideal interest in Marie-Antoinette, be moved to defend her upon every point, to constitute himself her advocate, her true knight, against all men, to be indignant at the bare idea of the blemishes and weaknesses which others fancy that they discover in her life; such a rôle of defender is worthy of respect if it is sincere, and it can readily be imagined in those who professed the cult of the old-time royalty, but it touches me much less in the case of new-comers in whom it can be nothing more than a deliberate *parti pris*. Such a standpoint is not mine; it can hardly be adopted by men who have not been reared in the religion of the old monarchy; and such is, as everybody must agree, the case with the immense majority of the present generation and of those which are to come. What seems to me much more to be desired, in the very interest of this affecting memory of Marie-Antoinette, is that there shall come forth, from the multitude of writings and testimonies of which she has been the subject, a lovely, noble, gracious figure, with her weaknesses, her frivolities, her fragility it may be, but with the essential qualities of a woman, a mother, and at times a queen, retained in all their integrity, with the kindness of heart of every generous epoch, and,



MARIE ANTOINETTE.

From an old painting.

finally, with the merits of resignation, of courage, and of gentleness, which fitly crown great misfortunes. Once historically established in this way, she will continue to interest in future ages all those who, becoming more and more indifferent to the political forms of the past, retain the refined and humane sentiments which are a part of civilisation as of nature; all those who weep over the misfortunes of Hecuba and of Andromache, and who, when they read the narrative of such and even greater misfortunes, will be touched by hers.

But there is this difference,—that poetry alone has undertaken to hand down the tradition of Andromache and Hecuba, and that we have no memoirs of the Court of Priam; whereas we have memoirs of the Court of Louis XVI, and there is no way to avoid taking them into account. What do these memoirs say of Marie-Antoinette? I mean the real memoirs, not the libels. What does the Comte de la Marck say, who well represents the spirit of that first period? Arrived in France at the age of fifteen, the young dauphiness was not yet nineteen when she found herself seated on the throne beside Louis XVI. That prince, fortified by a substantial education and endowed with all the moral qualities that we know, but weak, timid, abrupt, rough, and especially unattractive with women, had none of those qualities that were essential to guide his young wife. She, the daughter of an illustrious mother, had not been reared by Maria-Theresa herself,

who was too much engrossed by affairs of State, and her early education at Vienna had been sadly neglected. No one had ever imparted to her the taste for serious reading. Her mind, which was reasonably judicious and quick, "grasped and understood the things about which people spoke to her"; but it was not of great scope, and, in a word, had none of those qualities which atone for lack of education, or take the place of experience. Amiable, high-spirited, and innocently satirical, she had above all else great kindness of heart and a persistent desire to oblige those persons who applied to her. She had an intense longing for affection and intimacy, and she at once sought some person with whom she could become intimate, contrary to the custom at Court. Evidently her ideal of happiness was, on her release from the ceremonious scenes which bored her terribly, to find a merry, laughing, devoted, select circle, in which she seemed to forget that she was a queen, although in reality she remembered it perfectly. She loved, if I may so express it, to indulge herself in the pleasure of thus forgetting, and suddenly to remind herself what she really was, only to lavish favours upon all about her. We have seen, in opera-comiques and in pastoral plays, disguised queens who are the delight and the joy of those who surround them. Marie-Antoinette had that ideal of a happy life, which she might have realised without inconvenience if she had simply reigned in some kingdom like Tuscany or

Lorraine. But in France she could not even try it with impunity, and her Petit-Trianon, with its dairies, its sheepfolds, and its theatricals, was too near Versailles. Envy prowled about those too-favoured spots,—envy beckoning to stupidity and slander.

M. de la Marck has convincingly pointed out the disadvantage in the queen's confining herself at first so exclusively to the circle of the Comtesse Jules de Polignac, in giving to her, with the rank of a friend, the attitude of a favourite, and to all the men of that circle, the Vaudreuils, the Besenvals, and the Adhémars, pretensions and privileges which they so speedily abused, each according to his humour and his ambition. Although she never realised the full extent of these disadvantages, she did detect something of them; she felt that, where she sought repose and relaxation from her exalted rank, she still found selfish obsession; and when her attention was called to the fact that she often manifested too much preference for foreigners of distinction who were travelling in France, and that that might injure her in the minds of the French, she would reply sadly: "You are right, but at all events they do not ask me for anything."

Some of the men who, being admitted into this intimate circle, and to the queen's favour, were in honour bound to all the more gratitude and respect, were the first to speak slightingly of her, because they did not find her sufficiently docile to their schemes. As she seemed at one time to draw away a little

from the Polignac circle and to frequent the salon of Madame d'Ossun, the lady of the bedchamber, an habitué of the Polignac salon (whom M. de la Marck does not name, but who seems to have been one of the most influential members of that circle) wrote a very spiteful couplet against the queen, and this couplet, based upon an infamous lie, circulated through Paris. Thus it was that the Court itself and the queen's intimate circle furnished the first leaven which became blended with the coarse insults and infamies on the outside. For her part, she knew nothing of all this, and had no suspicion of the things which were arousing disaffection against her at Versailles, any more than of those things which were alienating people's hearts from her at Paris. To this day, when one desires to quote some testimony which will arouse feeling against Marie-Antoinette, the testimony of some one of importance, he seeks it in the memoirs of the Baron de Besenval.

Summoned to her presence in 1778, at the time of the duel between the Comte d'Artois and the Duc de Bourbon, M. de Besenval was introduced by Campan (secretary of the cabinet) into a room with which he was not familiar, simply but conveniently furnished. "I was surprised," he adds in passing, "not that the queen had desired so many facilities, but that she had dared to provide herself with them." This simple phrase, thrown in as an aside, is full of insinuation, and her enemies did not fail to seize upon it.

But I will deal with hidden meanings no more than I must, and will not hesitate to touch the most delicate point. There are people whose one thought it is to deny absolutely all frivolity and all aberrations of the heart on the part of Marie-Antoinette. For my own part, I make bold to think that the interest which is attached to her memory, that the compassion aroused by her unhappy fate and the noble way in which she bore it, that the execration which her judges and her executioner deserve, do not in any wise depend upon any anterior discovery relating to female frivolity, nor are at all diminished thereby. Now, in the present state of historical information concerning Marie-Antoinette, if we give due weight to genuine testimony, and at the same time remember what we have heard from the mouths of well-informed contemporaries, it is perfectly legitimate to think that that affectionate and high spirited person, governed entirely by impulse, in love with refined manners and chivalrous customs, longing simply to pour out her heart and to be understood, may very well have had some preference during these fifteen years of her youth; if the contrary were true, it would be much more extraordinary. However, many ambitious men and many coxcombs entered the lists and failed; there were overtures and assaults without number. Lauzun described his experience in his own way; the fact is that, in one way or another, he failed. The Prince de Ligne came frequently to France during those years,

and he was one of those foreigners, wholly French in his tastes and altogether attractive, with whom the queen was particularly pleased. He had the honour of riding with her in the morning.

"It was," he says, "during these rides, when I was alone with the queen, although surrounded by her gorgeous royal suite, that she told me a thousand interesting anecdotes concerning herself, and all the snares that had been laid for her in order to trick her into having lovers. At one time it was the Noailles family that wanted her to take the Viscount, at another time the Choiseul clique that destined Biron [Lauzun] for her, who, afterward!—but he was virtuous then. The Duchesse de Duras, when she was on duty, accompanied us in our rides; but we left her with the equerries, and that was one of the queen's thoughtless acts and one of her greatest crimes, since she was guilty of nothing more than negligence with respect to the bores of both sexes, who are always unforgiving."

Here we have the complement of Lauzun's narrative and the queen's own version thereof. I will observe, however, that it was not at all probable that Lauzun acted in the interest of the Choiseul clique, with whom he was always on ill terms; but those about the queen had an interest in presenting him in that aspect, in order to ruin him for good and all.

It was this same Prince de Ligne who said of her elsewhere: "Her alleged gallantry was never anything more than a profound feeling of friendship, more marked, it may be, for one or two persons, and the general coquettish desire of a woman and a queen to please everybody." This impression, or conjecture, which I find also in other shrewd observers who saw Marie-Antoinette at close quarters, is, I think, the most

probable. These *two persons* whom she especially distinguished at different times seem to have been, first, the Duc de Coigny, a sagacious and already mature man, and, secondly, M. de Fersen, colonel of the royal Swedish regiment in the French service, a man of exalted and chivalric character, who, in the days of evil fortune, betrayed himself only by his utter devotion.

However, when we come to these intimate and secret details concerning which it is so easy to find innumerable hints and so difficult to acquire certainty, I think that it is well to remember the sensible remark which Madame de Lassay (the natural daughter of a Condé) made one day to her husband, whom she heard discussing and attacking the virtue of Madame de Maintenon; she gazed at him in amazement and said to him, with admirable sang-froid: "How does it happen, monsieur, that you are so certain of these things?"

The queen's beauty in her youth has been enthusiastically praised. She was not a beauty, if we take her features in detail: the eyes, although expressive, were not very fine, her aquiline nose seemed too pronounced. "I am not quite sure that her nose belonged to her face," said a clever observer. Her lower lip was more prominent and thick than one expects in a pretty woman; her figure also was a little full; but the general effect was of a noble manner and sovereign dignity. Even in négligé hers was the beauty of a queen, rather than of a woman of fashion.

"No woman," said M. de Meilhan, "ever carried her head better, and it was so set upon her shoulders that every movement she made was instinct with grace and nobility. Her gait was stately, yet light, and recalled Virgil's phrase, '*incessu patuit dea.*' And there was in her person a still rarer quality,—the union of grace and of the most imposing dignity."

Add a dazzlingly fresh complexion, beautiful arms and hands, a charming smile, and tactful speech which found its inspiration less in the mind than in the heart, in the desire to be kind and to please.

For a long while this gracious creature, full of confidence in the prestige of royalty, and with no other thought than to temper it slightly in her own circle, paid no heed to politics, or at all events only at intervals, and when she was, as it were, driven to the wall by her intimate friends. She continued her life of illusions even when hateful remarks, satirical verses, and execrable pamphlets were being circulated in Paris, imputing to her a secret and constant influence which she never had. The affair of the necklace was the first signal of her misfortunes, and the bandage which had covered her eyes up to that date was torn away. She began to emerge from her enchanted village, and to know the world as it is when it has an interest in being cruel. When she was induced to give her attention regularly to public affairs and to form an opinion upon the extraordinary measures and occurrences which daily compelled attention, she brought thereto the least politic disposition that can be imagined,—I mean, indignation against the prevailing cow-

ardice, personal prejudices over which her manifest interest did not always enable her to triumph, a resentment of insults which was not thirst for vengeance but rather the shrinking and proud suffering of wounded dignity. If Louis XVI had been a different man, and if he had offered any opportunity for a vigorous and enthusiastic impelling force, there is no doubt that at some time or other, under the queen's inspiration, he would have attempted some enterprise which might well have been a reckless one, but which perhaps would have re-established for a while the tottering monarchical system. But nothing of the sort took place; Louis XVI's mind escaped and shrank from acting his rôle of king by reason of his very virtues; his nature, which was a mixture of piety and humanity, always inclined to sacrifice, and passing from one weakness to another, he was destined never to become great again until he became a martyr. The queen had not those qualities which she needed to triumph over such utter incapacity and inertia on the part of the king. She had flashes of energy, but there was no coherence. This is the complaint that constantly recurs under the pen of the Comte de la Marck in the secret correspondence which has just been published.

"The queen," he wrote to the Comte de Mercy-Argenteau on December 30, 1790, "the queen certainly has the intellect and strength of mind to do great things; but it must be confessed, and you have had a better opportunity than I to notice it, that, whether in business, or simply in conversation, she does not always display that degree of

attention which is indispensable to learn thoroughly what it is necessary to know in order to guard against errors and to make sure of success."

And again, to the same correspondent, September 28, 1791:

"I must speak plainly,—the king is incapable of reigning and the queen, if well supported, might make up for his incapacity; but even that would not be enough: it is essential also that the queen should realise the necessity of attending to public affairs with some method and order; that she should make it a rule no longer to grant a sort of half-confidence to many people, but that she should give her entire confidence to the one man whom she may choose to support her."

And again, on October 10, 1791:

"The queen, with abundant intelligence and tried courage, nevertheless allows all the opportunities of seizing upon the reins of government and surrounding the king with faithful subjects, devoted to her service and to serving the State with her and through her,—all these opportunities she allows to escape her."

In truth, one does not recover in a day from so long-continued and habitual frivolity; it would have been none too great an exploit for the genius of a Catherine of Russia to contend against dangers so unforeseen by her who had never opened a volume of history in her life, and who had dreamed of a royalty of idleness at Trianon; it is enough that her past frivolity had in no wise impaired or deteriorated her heart, and that when the test came it approved itself as noble, as proud, as regal, and as fully endowed as it could have been when it came from the hands of nature.

I do not propose to discuss the political course

which Marie-Antoinette thought it well to adopt when she was abandoned to her own resources. We are no constitutional purists; what she desired was certainly not the Constitution of '91, but the salvation of the throne, the salvation of France as she understood it, the king's honour and her own, the honour of the nobility, and the integrity of the inheritance which she hoped to bequeath to her children; do not ask her for anything more. Those letters of hers which have already been published, and others which will be published some day, enable us to establish this portion of history with certainty. She desired the salvation of the State through her brother the emperor, through foreign powers, but not through the émigrés. She could not contain her indignation against them. "The cowards," she cried, "after deserting us, have the assurance to demand that we alone should expose ourselves to danger, and that we alone should serve their interests!"

In a very noble letter, addressed to the Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, in which these words occur, she also said, after setting forth the details of a desperate plan (August, 1791):

"I have listened, as well as I could, to people on both sides, and from all their opinions I have formed my own; I do not know whether it will be followed,—you know the person with whom I have to deal [the king]: just when I think that he is persuaded, a word, an argument, makes him change unwittingly; and that is why innumerable things cannot be undertaken. However, whatever happens, retain your friendship and your attachment to me; I need them sadly, and

be assured, that no matter what misfortune may pursue me, I may yield to the force of circumstances, but I shall never consent to anything unworthy of me; only in misfortune does one realise what one really is. My blood flows in my son's veins, and I hope that some day he will show himself a worthy grandson of Maria Theresa."

The last ray of joy and of hope that she knew was at the time of the flight to Varennes. At the moment when this so long postponed journey was at last about to be undertaken, toward midnight, the queen, as she crossed the Carrousel on foot, toward the carriage made ready for the royal family by M. de Fersen, passed M. de Lafayette's carriage; she recognised it, and she actually indulged a fantastic impulse to try to touch all the wheels with a switch which she held in her hands. It was an innocent revenge. That tap with the switch was, as it were, her last outburst of gaiety. Three days later, how different was the prospect! The moment that Madame Campan met her after the return from Varennes, the queen removed her hat and bade her see the effect which sorrow had produced upon her hair: "In a single night it had become as white as that of a woman of seventy!" She was thirty-six!

The queen's last two years would suffice to redeem, a thousand times over, more errors than that refined and charming young woman could possibly have committed in her years of frivolity, and to sanctify such a destiny in the compassion of future ages. A prisoner in her own family, subject to incessant anguish of mind, we see her become purified beside that

saintlike sister, Madame Élisabeth, and arm herself more and more with those sentiments of domesticity which afford such entire consolation only to hearts that are naturally kind and not corrupt. On the fatal day, the day of insurrection and uprising, when every part of her abode is invaded, she is at her post; she endures insult with pride, with dignity, with clemency, at the same time that she shields her children with her own body; amid her own perils, she is entirely engrossed, in her kindness of heart, by the perils of others, and she displays the utmost anxiety to compromise no one uselessly in her cause. On the last day, the supreme day of royalty, the Tenth of August, she tries to impart to Louis XVI an enthusiasm which would have caused him to die like a king, like a descendant of Louis XIV; but it was as a Christian and as a descendant of Saint Louis that he was destined to die.

In her turn she enters upon that path of heroism all instinct with resignation and patience. Once imprisoned in the Temple, she works at her tapestry, attends to the education of her son and daughter, composes a prayer for her children, and accustoms herself to drink the bitter cup in silence. The head of the Princess of Lamballe, held against the bars of her window, caused her to feel the first shudder of death. When she left the Temple to be transferred to the Conciergerie, she struck her head against the wicket, having forgotten to stoop. Some one asked if she had hurt herself.

"Oh, no!" she replied, "nothing can hurt me now." But every moment of her agony has been described, and it is not for us to repeat it. In my opinion, it is impossible to imagine a monument of more atrocious stupidity and more ignominious to the human race than the trial of Marie-Antoinette, as it is officially reported in Volume XXIX of the *Histoire Parliamentaire de la Révolution Française.* Most of the answers which she made to the charges are mutilated or suppressed, but, as in every iniquitous prosecution, the mere text of the charges testifies against the assassins. When we reflect that an age called an age of enlightenment and of the most refined civilisation resorted to public acts of such utter barbarity, we begin to doubt human nature and to shrink from the savage beast, no less bestial than savage in very truth, which human nature holds sometimes within itself, and which asks nothing better than to come forth.

Immediately after her sentence, when she had been taken back from the Tribunal to the Conciergerie, Marie-Antoinette wrote a letter dated October 16th, at half-past four in the morning, and addressed to Madame Élisabeth. In this letter, which is marked by the utmost simplicity, we read:

"To you, my sister, I write for the last time. I have been sentenced, not to a shameful death,—for it is shameful only to criminals,—but to join your brother. Innocent like him, I hope to display the same firmness that he did in these final moments. I am calm as one is calm when conscience has no reproach to make; I profoundly regret having to abandon my poor children. You know that I have

existed solely for them; and you, my dear and loving sister, you who through your love sacrificed everything to be with us,—in what a position I leave you!"

The most sincere sentiments of the mother, of the friend, of the refined Christian, breathe in this testamentary letter. We know that Marie-Antoinette gave proof, a few hours later, of that tranquillity and steadfastness which she hoped to command at the last moment; and even the report of the executioners admits that she mounted the scaffold "with reasonable courage."

I think that we have not even yet all the elements to write with befitting simplicity the life of Marie-Antoinette; there are in existence manuscript collections of letters to her brother the Emperor Joseph, and to the Emperor Leopold, and the Chancellery of Vienna must contain treasures of this description. But I venture to prophesy that the publication of these confidential documents, if it ever takes place, will simply confirm the idea that reflection and a careful perusal of the extant memoirs may well afford to-day. Marie-Antoinette's noble mother, from whom she inherited that eagle nose and that regal bearing, imprinted upon her the seal of her race; but that imperial temperament, which appeared at critical moments, was not the habitual temperament of her mind, of her education, and of her dreams; she appeared as the daughter of the Cæsars only by flashes. She was made to be the peaceful and slightly rustic heiress of the Empire,

rather than to conquer her kingdom for herself; most of all, beneath that august brow, she was made to be a lovable wife, a loyal and constant friend, a tender and devoted mother. She had all the good qualities and the charms, and some of the weaknesses too, of woman. Adversity supplied her with womanly virtues; elevation of the heart and dignity of character manifested themselves with the more splendour because they were not accompanied by a mind altogether equal to the circumstances of her destiny. Such as she is, a victim of the most detestable and most brutal of sacrifices, an example of the most horrible of vicissitudes, she does not need that the veneration for ancient families should still exist to arouse a feeling of sympathy and of tender compassion in all those who read the story of her brilliant years and of her last agony. Every man who has in his heart any touch of the generosity of a Barnave will experience the same impression, and, if it must be said, the same conversion that he experienced on approaching that noble and bitterly outraged figure. As for the women, Madame de Staël long ago said to them the word best fitted to go to their hearts, in her defence of Marie-Antoinette: "I turn again to you, to you women, sacrificed one and all in so loving a mother, sacrificed one and all by so murderous an attack upon womanly weakness; it is all over with your empire if brutal ferocity is to hold sway."

In truth, Marie-Antoinette is even more mother than

queen. Every one knows the first words that fell from her, when, being as yet only dauphiness, somebody reproved in her presence a woman, who, to obtain the pardon of her son, who had been involved in a duel, had appealed to Madame Du Barry herself: "If I had been in her place, I would have done the same, and if necessary I would have thrown myself at the feet of Zamore" [Madame Du Barry's little negro page].

And we know also that last remark of Marie-Antoinette before the atrocious Tribunal, when, being questioned concerning certain shocking imputations, which assailed the innocence of her son, her only reply was to exclaim: "I appeal to all mothers!" That is the supreme outcry which dominates her life, the outcry which goes to the inmost heart, and which will echo in her behalf in ages to come.

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